



Limerick and Clare Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy

Executive Summary June 2013

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AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the Limerick and Clare Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy is to develop a framework to coordinate the objectives and targets of key stakeholders in a cohesive and integrated plan for the area and to work together in ensuring the provision, management and use of quality facilities and services for everyone, including future generations. Through the strategy, county and city councils and other key stakeholders can work together to determine key recreational priorities for the region and to demonstrate commitment, cooperation and shared vision in developing sport and physical recreational opportunities for all, with an improvement in the health and overall quality of life of those who live and work in the area as well as those who visit it as the ultimate aim.

The objectives which are addressed in this strategy are as follows -

- The development of a set of goals and objectives for the provision of sporting and physical recreation facilities in the area
- The preparation of an analysis of the existing provision within the focus area and adjacent areas
- A review of the population necessary to support different types of facilities
- A review of current and projected future population within the relevant areas
- The identification of any gaps or excess in the provision of larger-scale facilities
- The identification of the resources available and gaps in provision for those with disabilities who wish to participate in sports and active recreation
- The identification of any opportunities for the provision of facilities that address a new sporting or active recreation area
- The development of a set of policies that will guide Local Authorities in their land-use management and development functions and provide information to others including other public and publicly-funded bodies who may wish to undertake the development of sports or physical recreation projects
- The carrying out of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive Screening as part of the process of carrying out the strategy development.

Even where a need or opportunity for the provision of new facilities has been identified, specific sites are not specified for such developments. However, general areas have been identified for some such developments while the criteria that should be used to identify specific sites are included for all such developments.

The strategy does not focus on community-based or community level facilities though it does recognise their importance and does refer to them. These facilities are primarily aimed at the needs of local communities and perform an important function in that role. While not analysing this provision in any depth, however, the strategy does provide some guidance on best practice in the

governance and management of such facilities and the criteria that might be used in deciding whether or not such facilities should receive public funding support.

It should also be noted that the strategy does not focus on non-active recreation such as provided for by cultural facilities. While this is another important area of provision it is beyond the scope of this project.

Key Recommendations

The following are the key recommendations of this strategy. They are based on the analysis of current and future needs and activities, the need to maximise the use of scarce resources and to promote collaboration between different types of providers, the need to address access issues for all citizens in the area and the need to provide for the many visitors who come to use the area's facilities. The recommendations also recognise that co-operation will be needed between public and publicly funded bodies, voluntary sporting organisations, community organisations, the education sector and private facility providers if an efficient and integrated framework is to be available to the citizens and visitors in Limerick and Clare. It should be noted that though this strategy has regard to other areas, the strategy itself applies only to the administrative areas of County Clare and Limerick City and County and that, in particular, it specifically does not apply to the administrative area of North Tipperary.

Strategic Approach to Facility Distribution

- 1 That a hierarchy of facility provision will be adopted as follows –
 - Large scale stadia and facilities
 - Multi-sport facilities at key locations
 - Smaller scale multi-sport facilities
 - Community-level facilities for sports and physical recreation at a level smaller than the multi-sport facilities referred to above
 - Specific facilities provided by individual sports and recreation clubs and organisations to meet their own needs
- 2 That larger-scale sports and physical recreation stadia and facilities be located within the areas of Limerick Metropolitan Area, Shannon and Ennis in order to maximise accessibility of larger populations, to maximise the viability of the facilities and to maximise the potential use of public transport facilities for providing access to these facilities. In particular, where significant areas have been developed or are planned for development provision should be made for the establishment of multi-sports facilities in accordance with the recommendations of the Draft National Sports Facilities Strategy 2012 - 2016.
- 3 That new stadia for team games will generally not be permitted within the area other than

- the provision within Limerick Metropolitan Area of one medium-sized stadium not exceeding a capacity of 7,500 with a primary focus on the accommodation of League of Ireland soccer matches and
 - the provision of a new stadium at an appropriate location and which replaces an existing stadium.
- 4 That the provision of facilities which have specific needs which require them to be located outside the Limerick Metropolitan Area/Shannon/Ennis area will be accommodated subject to addressing the environmental considerations outlined below.
- 5 That key sub-regional locations be identified for the provision of all-weather sports facilities to accommodate a wide range of sports and physical recreation activities and such that, no person is significantly more than 20 kilometres from such a facility. These locations will relate to the regional structure outlined in the Regional Planning Guidelines and should include -
- Provision of facilities in the Limerick Metropolitan Area in accordance with the considerations outlined at section 4.3.2 of this strategy including the provision of at least one area to serve the North side of Limerick Metropolitan Area and one area to serve the South side of Limerick Metropolitan Area. These facilities should incorporate the facilities set out in the following two paragraphs and which should not be in addition to the facilities referred to in this paragraph
 - One area to provide an integrated training facility for soccer within the Limerick Metropolitan Area
 - One area to provide a multi-sports facility for Limerick Institute of Technology
 - One multi-sports all-weather facility in Shannon
 - The enhancement of the Lee's Road Regional Sports Facility in Ennis and the provision of a substantial indoor sports facility in the town of Ennis that will be managed as part of the overall Lee's Road facility
 - The provision and/or upgrading of one integrated all-weather multi-sports facility in key settlements within Limerick and Clare but outside the Limerick Metropolitan Area/Ennis/Shannon area. The precise distribution of these locations should be decided by the Planning Authorities acting in consultation but should reflect the sub-regional centres identified in the Regional Planning Guidelines and should also have regard to the locations where substantial sports facility development has taken place or is under way. In that context the following locations should be included for consideration -
 - Kilrush
 - Killaloe/Ballina
 - Lisdoonvarna
 - Lahinch/Ennistymon
 - Tulla

- Scarrif
- Newcastlewest
- Kilmallock
- Rathkeale

Over time the facilities at these locations should include the following as a minimum –

- One full-size, floodlit all-weather playing pitch capable of accommodating those games that require the largest playing area
- Grass pitches for a variety of sports
- A floodlit walking/running track incorporating outdoor gym facilities
- An indoor facility capable of accommodating full basketball games
- Facilities for other sports such as tennis and bowls
- A play area
- Training areas

All these facilities may not be on the one site but where they are on a number of sites, they should be managed and maintained by a single entity.

- 6 That smaller-scale facilities be provided at other intermediate locations such that no person is generally more than 10 kilometres from such a facility. These facilities should include a floodlit all-weather playing area that is not of full size, a walking track, a playground, an outdoor gym and an indoor games hall. In these locations attempts should be made to maximise the use of existing facilities and to upgrade them where necessary, developing new facilities only where unavoidable. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of training facilities at these locations as the absence of such facilities can prove a significant barrier to participation in sports.
- 7 That the provision of facilities that allow the better use and enjoyment of sporting and physical recreation facilities which make use of natural resources will generally be permitted provided that they are of an appropriate scale and address the environmental conditions as set out below. Where possible this should be achieved by the enhancement of existing facilities rather than the provision of new facilities. In addition, areas may be identified as hubs for particular forms of sporting and physical recreation activities related to their natural amenities and/or geographic location and development plans prepared to facilitate the development of such hubs.
- 8 That the provision of smaller-scale community-based facilities will continue to be supported subject to the requirements as set out above and the meeting of environmental considerations as set out below. Such facilities might include a children's playground, a safe walking/cycling route and a community hall used for non-competitive physical recreation.

Social and Physical Access to Facilities

- 9 That the needs of all age-groups are considered when facilities are being developed and that, in particular, the needs of the young and of older people are given particular attention. With regard to the former this should relate to the incorporation of age-appropriate green spaces into all developments in accordance with the provisions of the document 'Play Space Guidelines 2007 (DDDA 2006). With regard to the latter it should include the provision of separate cycle paths, the provision of level, well-maintained, non-slip walkways and convenient access to parks and green spaces as recommended by the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Programme. This policy will be implemented through the criteria used for determining the basis on which locally-controlled public funds will be allocated to projects; through the criteria used to determine which proposals to other funders should receive the backing of public bodies in the area; and through the use of other planning and licensing processes where possible and appropriate.
- 10 That new facilities will be provided in a manner that will seek to encourage physical activity amongst different age groups in a single location by, for example, providing a children's playground and an adult outdoor gym or walking area in close proximity. In addition, that where significant facilities are planned, these should be located, where possible, close to schools and public open space.
- 11 That particular consideration be given to the provision within publicly-funded facilities, of the spaces and equipment necessary to accommodate those activities that have been identified as being most likely to encourage additional participation in sports or physical activities amongst the resident population.
- 12 That the needs of those with a disability are provided for in the design and development of facilities for sports and physical recreation. Such an approach should include the following –
 - The incorporation of provision for those with a disability in the design of new facilities
 - The making of special provision for those with a disability in certain circumstances e.g. the provision of boardwalk areas on walking routes
 - The development and implementation of a programme of upgrading of those facilities that cannot currently adequately accommodate those with disabilities

This policy will be implemented through the criteria used for determining the basis on which locally-controlled public funds will be allocated to projects; through the criteria used to determine which proposals to other funders should receive the backing of public bodies in the area; and through the use of other planning and licensing processes where possible and appropriate.

- 13 That the needs of those who cannot afford to pay for the use of facilities be taken into account when new facilities or the integration of existing facilities are being proposed and that mechanisms are incorporated into the project proposal which will help to address this issue. In addition and in order to facilitate access by those with limited resources, that the pricing policies of facilities be such as to require a reasonable level of payment by those that can afford to do so.

In addition that the needs of the working population be taken into account when new facilities or the integration of existing facilities are being proposed and that mechanisms are incorporated into the project proposal which will help to address this issue with particular regard to the provision of opening hours that are convenient for this population.

Also, that the provision of public transport to proposed facilities and to existing facilities not currently served by such transport will be examined as part of the objective of maximising access to sports and physical recreation opportunities for all, with the intention of arranging for the establishment of such services where possible.

This policy will be implemented through the criteria used for determining the basis on which locally-controlled public funds will be allocated to projects; through the criteria used to determine which proposals to other funders should receive the backing of public bodies in the area; and through the use of other planning and licensing processes where possible and appropriate.

The Need for New Facilities

- 14 That new developments of the following types of facility will generally not be supported within the area unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is a need for the facility and that its provision will not impact on the viability of other existing facilities either within the strategy area or in areas that border it –
 - Golf Course
 - Private swimming pool other than in an education context
 - Racecourse
 - Greyhound Stadium
- 15 That facilities and resources associated with the following sports and activities will generally be permitted subject to meeting environmental protection requirements and the identification of a market need that will not give rise to deadweight or displacement; and that proactive actions will be taken to enhance access to such facilities particularly through the provision of year-round parking, pathway and storage facilities where required.
 - Walking trails both urban (Sli na Slainte) and rural and associated amenities such as sculpture trails or nature walks. The provision of walking trails in urban environments is of specific benefit as it provides for the most common form of physical activity undertaken by the urban population, it requires little investment or maintenance as most of the facilities are in place and it offers an opportunity to link sports and recreation provision with the objectives of the Smarter Travel agenda.
 - Dedicated cycle routes. In this regard particular attention should be paid to the potential to use abandoned routes such as the Abbeyfeale railway line and the West Clare railway line for the provision of new facilities.

- Mountain-bike trails. In this regard, in particular, the Ballyhoura bike trail system should be developed and enhanced with the provision of additional facilities to accommodate a wide range of users including families.
- Other trails including long-distance walking and cycling routes which should be developed in accordance with the principles set out in the publication 'Creating Green Infrastructure in Ireland' (Comhar, 2010).
- Water-based activities on the Shannon, the Shannon Estuary, the Fergus and the Fergus Estuary including sailing, marine sailing, canoeing and kayaking, rowing, surfing, wind-surfing, and fishing. In this regard, specific provision should be made for rowing within the Limerick Metropolitan Area in order to benefit from one of the best stretches of rowing water in the country by, amongst other things, the holding of regattas in the area.
- Equestrian Activities. In this regard specific provision should be made for indoor facilities for equestrian activities in Limerick and within the Ennis Area.
- Children's playgrounds and adult outdoor gyms particularly in areas where the level of provision is less than the national average. Such provision should be made in accordance with the standards set out in the document 'Play Space Guidelines 2007 (DDDA 2006).
- Other outdoor activities such as mountain climbing, orienteering and rock-climbing.

Integration of the Use of Facilities

- 16 That where public access to a particular type of facility is not available but a private facility is available in the area, to seek to make arrangements with the private facility owner for the provision of public access.
- 17 That the adoption of integrated multi-sport models of facility provision be promoted and supported where possible and appropriate. Such multi-sport models will promote the inclusion of public, voluntary, school-based and privately-owned facilities in a particular area under a joint management body in order to maximise the use of existing facilities, to ensure that facilities do not lie idle more than is necessary and to ensure that where new facilities are proposed they will be provided only where there is a clear lack of capacity in the area. The promotion of such a model will be carried out through the nature of the criteria used for determining the basis on which locally-controlled public funds will be allocated to projects; through the criteria used to determine when proposals to other funders should receive the endorsement of public bodies in the area; through the use of other planning and licensing processes where possible and appropriate; and through the promotion of the adoption of this policy by funders at national and regional level.
- 18 That it will be a policy of all those engaged in the development and management of sports and physical recreation in the area to promote the adoption of the concept of Healthy Stadia.

A Healthy Stadium is, one that promotes the health of visitors, fans and the local community – and one that provides a place where people can go and have a positive, healthy experience playing or watching sport.

The Healthy Stadia concept is firmly based on a commitment to partnership and requires a multi-stakeholder approach comprising three elements; creating supportive and healthy working and living environments, integrating health promotion into the daily activities of the setting and developing links with other settings and with the wider community.

- 19 That where a new sports or community hall is being provided it is designed to be of a size that will accommodate those sports that require the greatest floor area and that the granting of permission for the provision of such a development be dependent on its being designed to such a standard.
- 20 That where new all-weather pitches are being provided they should be designed to accommodate those sports that require the largest playing area and that provision be made for the installation of flood-lighting when possible.
- 21 That the provision of sports hall and pitch facilities be based on an integrated multi-sport model and that the promoters of any such facility be required to indicate how such integration will be implemented and that undertakings be given with regard to the on-going provision of coaching and other supports.
- 22 That different models for the integration of sports facility provision at community level be supported. These models include a single-site model in which all facilities both indoor and outdoor are accommodated on the one site and a multi-site model in which both new and existing facilities located on one or more sites are managed in an integrated way through the use of mechanisms that have a legal status and that can ensure the on-going participation of facility owners and the overall community.
- 23 That where integrated facilities are being provided a floodlit walking route is incorporated as part of the overall development.
- 24 That the local community served by a particular facility be involved in the design, development and management of such facility.

Development and Management of Sports Clubs

- 25 That collaborative mechanisms for the establishment of new sports clubs at key locations be examined to facilitate the taking up of a range of individual non-invasive sports by all age groups. Such collaborative mechanisms should include community and voluntary organisations, national governing bodies, local development organisations, public bodies and educational bodies and would be appropriately promoted and supported by the Local Sports Partnerships. The types of sports that might be considered under this heading include gymnastics, martial arts, racquet sports, aerobics, dance, athletics, sulky-racing and cycling as well as team sports. Sports that have a specific historic and cultural value should be particularly considered for support under this heading.

- 26 That the enhancement of the Governance of individual organisations that own and manage facilities that are or that might be used for sports and physical recreation activities be supported in order to provide the management bodies of such organisations with the confidence and the capacity to engage in the collaborative and integrated models and processes outlined in this document. Mechanisms for the implementation of this objective will include the application of a Club Mentoring Programme and the provision of coordinated support to voluntary organisations.
- 27 That the tenure of sporting organisations with regard to land they hold from public authorities will be examined and amended where necessary and possible with the purpose of facilitating the achievement of the community-based, multi-sport integrated approaches referred to in this strategy.
- 28 That with regard to a small number of community and voluntary organisations which provide substantial sports and physical recreation facilities that are open to the general public and which face on-going uncertainties and funding challenges arising from their public service role, a long-term and sustainable funding system be identified and developed for such organisations and that the barriers to such organisations accessing funding are addressed. Such funding mechanisms should provide for on-going maintenance and development as well as providing support for normal operational costs.

Economic Potential of Sport and Physical Recreation

- 29 That the needs of the tourism sector are taken into account when proposals for new development or activities are being considered and that the proposers of facilities which will be reliant on visitors for their viability be requested to provide evidence of the likely use of the facility by visitors to the area and that the proposed facility will not undermine the viability of existing facilities in the area.
- 30 That pro-active steps be taken to promote international, national and regional sporting events within the area, particularly those such as the Great Limerick Run that involve mass participation and that the benefits of the designation of Limerick as Ireland's European City of Sport be built on in this context. In addition, the development of Limerick as a centre for Sports Medicine should be pursued through the collaboration of sporting organisations, Higher Education Institutes and other relevant organisations.

Environmental Considerations

- 31 That where existing facilities are being upgraded the opportunity will be taken to upgrade those aspects of the facility that have an impact on the environment including the reduction in the use of energy, the improvement in the systems used for the treatment and disposal of waste-water and the management of associated activities to address any negative environmental impacts arising from them.
- 32 That where infrastructure developments are being undertaken, consideration will be given to whether and to what extent facilities for sport and physical recreation can be incorporated in the design and that where such provision is possible it will be made.

- 33 That when open space is being provided in association with other developments or as stand-alone amenities the quality of the open space as well as its quantity will be assessed with particular regard to its role in promoting sports and physical recreation either in itself or through the added value it provides for existing facilities. A matrix for the provision of open space such as that contained in the Limerick City Development Plan should be adopted.
- 34 That nothing in this strategy should be interpreted so as to prevent the implementation of the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary when it is adopted insofar as it applies to Sport and Physical Recreation.
- 35 That actions be taken to implement a 'Leave no Trace' approach to the use of the natural environment for sports and physical recreation so that the any natural amenity used by the public should not be impacted upon by that use and anything taken into the natural environment will be taken out again by the user.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Introduction

International research has established the importance of recreational and physical activities in combating and mitigating a range of serious health and socio-economic issues from tackling the growing obesity epidemic, improving mental health, promoting the inclusion of marginalised or disenfranchised groups in society to boosting local economic development and enhancing participation and engagement among the elderly and people with disabilities.

The main aim of the Limerick and Clare Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy, therefore, is to develop a framework to coordinate the objectives and targets of key stakeholders in a cohesive and integrated plan for the area and to work together in ensuring the provision, management and use of quality facilities and services for everyone, including future generations. Through the strategy, county and city councils and other key stakeholders can work together to determine key recreational priorities for the region and to demonstrate commitment, cooperation and shared vision in developing sport and physical recreational opportunities for all, with an improvement in the health and overall quality of life of those who live and work in the area as well as those who visit it as the following is stated in the brief for the preparation of a Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy for County Clare, County Limerick and Limerick Metropolitan Area.

Recreational facilities and amenities exist at regional, county and local levels and perform a number of inter-related functions. They are an integral part of the quality-of-life infrastructure and contribute significantly to the physical, mental and social health of the population; they contribute significantly to the attractiveness of an area as a location for inward investment and as a desirable destination for a mobile labour market; and they add to the tourism and visitor infrastructure particularly in the context of activity and adventure holidays.

Over recent years the significant improvements in the traffic and transport infrastructure of the Mid-West region has resulted in substantial increases in both intra and inter-regional accessibility. This means that facilities and other recreation resources that may not have been accessible in a meaningful way have now become more accessible to the population of the region and visitors alike.

Sports and recreational infrastructure has, historically, been largely provided by local communities in towns, rural areas and counties. With some notable exceptions (major sporting facilities for example), facilities and infrastructure has often been put in place with the intention of providing for a local population and its visitors alone. Often, little thought has been given to the potential of the facility to serve a wider population outside the community or the applicable administrative area as a whole. This has sometimes resulted in the wasteful duplication of facilities, difficulties being experienced by the owners and management of the facilities in ensuring their on-going viability and under-utilisation of expensive infrastructure.

(Delaney, Liam and Tony Fahey, Social and economic value of sport in Ireland, ESRI, 2005)

It is to address these issues that it has been agreed between the relevant Local Authorities that a Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy be developed. . It should be noted that though this strategy has regard to other areas, the strategy itself applies only to the administrative areas of County Clare and Limerick City and County and that, in particular, it specifically does not apply to the administrative area of North Tipperary.

The strategy is sub-regional and high-level in its approach, and does not, therefore, focus on community-based or community level facilities though it does recognise their importance and does refer to them. These facilities are primarily aimed at the needs of local communities rather than regional populations and perform an important function in that role. While not analysing this provision in any depth, however, the strategy does provide some guidance on best practice in the governance and management of such facilities and the criteria that might be used in deciding whether or not such facilities should receive public funding support.

It should also be noted that the strategy does not focus on non-active recreation such as provided for by cultural facilities. While this is another important area of provision it is beyond the scope of this project.

Review of Current Knowledge

The strategy examines current knowledge with regards to sport and physical recreation within the area under consideration (though some account is also taken of the areas beyond the boundaries of Limerick and Clare). This review examines, amongst other things, levels of participation in sports and physical recreation by the people of Limerick and Clare with particular regard to the nature of the activities undertaken as well as the reasons for non-participation.

In addition, the review examines the impact of travel times and facility quality on the distances that people are willing to travel to make use of a facility. It suggests that travel distance has a significant effect though no clear appropriate distances are identified as being desirable. A review of data from England and Australia suggests very short travel distances of between 3 km and 6 km being desirable but it is considered that these are unrealistic for many kinds of facilities in Ireland.

Review of Current Plans and Strategies

A review was also carried out of current plans and strategies with regard to sport and physical recreation, including those of –

- The Planning Authorities
- The Regional Authority
- The former Limerick City Regeneration Agency
- Local Sports Partnerships
- National Sporting Bodies including the GAA, the FAI and the IRFU
- Tourism Development Strategies

Themes that emerged from these reviews

The themes that emerged from a review of the data and strategies were as follows –

1. *Role of Sports and Physical Recreation*

Sports and Physical Recreation is seen as an important element in all aspects of life and for all ages. It is common knowledge by now that sport and physical recreation have important health benefits both physical and psychological. However, sport and recreation are also seen as having important social and economic impacts both direct and indirect. Indeed one strategy suggested that the development of sporting and recreational facilities could have a major impact on social behavior as much by the social significance that would be associated with such development as by the physical activity to which it would give rise.

2. *The range of sports and recreation facilities that are already available in the region and in close proximity thereto*

The Limerick/Clare area already has a wide range of facilities both natural and built available to it. For an area of its size it is well provided with large stadia that can accommodate mass sporting events. The area also has newly-developed specialist sporting facilities as well as training and physical conditioning facilities of national standard.

This does not mean that all sports are well catered for but it does mean that the facilities that remain to be developed are less numerous than might be the case in other regions.

3. *The extent to which the Limerick/Clare area reflects national trends with respect to sports and physical recreation participation*

The studies carried out in the Mid-West Region and in the Limerick and Clare areas in particular suggest that the trends in the region mirror national trends very closely. These trends relate to levels of participation and inactivity, to the age and social profiles of participants and to the most popular physical and sporting activities. This means that national data can reasonably be applied to the Limerick and Clare population with regard to these topics.

4. *The nature of the activities that are of greatest interest to the local and visitor populations*

There is a clear trend as to the most popular sporting and physical recreation activities amongst the various populations. The positive aspect of this data is that much of the facilities that needs to be provided in order to facilitate enhanced activity is not very costly. Much attention is paid to mass sporting occasions and to team games. However, the percentage of the population that participates actively in team sports after school leaving age is small. However, the activities that people do participate in are more individual pursuits that are generally well provided for and that can be easily enhanced by low-cost provision of facilities. The one exception in this regard is swimming. In general, swimming facilities are mentioned as an important resource though the level of usage by the public in general is such that most public facilities require public subvention and most private facilities require a variety of other associated activities to remain viable.

5. *The perceived importance of water-sport development*

This is seen by virtually all plans and strategies as being of significant importance in the area both for visitors and the local population. Given the wealth of water resources in the area this is not surprising.

6. *The need to provide for those who are in danger of being marginalized and excluded*

This is reflected in the 'whole-of-life' or 'lifecycle' approach taken by most organisations when developing their strategies. This approach adopts the broadest possible view when considering recreation needs and is typically targeted at the following groups: children, young adults, elderly, people with disabilities and people experiencing social exclusion. This also needs to be reflected in the way facilities are designed and operated so that those with most barriers to participation are most facilitated.

An interesting point in this context, however, is that lack of access, transport or cost was not mentioned as prohibitive factors for the inactive population in the Mid-West. On the other hand, however, disability or illness and age were mentioned by significant numbers.

7. *The need to find a balance between the over-provision of expensive facilities that require larger populations and the provision of reasonable access to a wide range of the most-used facilities*

In studies such as this a lot of attention tends to be focused on the development of facilities for team and specialist sports. However, the evidence clearly suggests that activities such as walking and hiking, cycling, gyms and similar individual, non-invasive activities are those most likely to give rise to additional physical and sporting activity. It is important, therefore, that access to the lower impact but high-demand facilities is maximized and that a more strategic approach be taken to the provision of the more specialized facilities.

8. *The importance of the development of sports clubs for particular sports as well as the development of the facilities to sustain them*

While the development of facilities for sport and physical recreation is extremely important, the development and support of clubs to facilitate the taking up of activities that are less high-profile and less wide-spread is also important. Thus, there are few clubs for many forms of sport such as gymnastics, badminton, tennis and so on as well as other outdoor team sports such as cricket. The need to provide some focus on the development of the soft infrastructure for sport development as well as the hard infrastructure is another emerging theme.

9. *The need to maximize the use of the facilities that already exist in the community, to upgrade and to enhance them where necessary as well as to provide new facilities*

Many communities already have a significant range of existing and potential facilities within them. As resources for the provision of facilities become more and more constrained it is important that the use of existing facilities is maximized. This may require some upgrading of facilities but it will also mean changes in governance, changes in the way in which access is provided to facilities and the management of the total community resource in an integrated way by the community with external advice and guidance where necessary.

10. The need to ensure that new investment in facilities allows for maximum access

The need to maximize the return on public investment in sports and recreation facilities, particularly at community level, will require that where new investments are being made, the making available of the facilities being funded to a wide range of users will need to be ensured. This has been recently emphasised by Government Ministers and it is important that such an approach be reflected in this strategy.

These themes formed the basis of the strategic approach that was developed in the document.

Distribution of Population and Current Facilities

The review of the location of facilities concluded that some facilities, such as walking routes and fishing locations for example, were very widely distributed, while others, such as swimming pools, golf courses and multi-sports facilities, were less well distributed. In this regard Clare and the area in the vicinity of Limerick Metropolitan Area were reasonably well served. However, the West Limerick area is less well served with facilities. When considering the West Limerick area, however, regard must also be had to facilities in other counties as parts of West Limerick can be serviced by facilities in North Kerry, North Cork and West Tipperary. It is also noted that a wide range of facilities are available within individual communities.

Outcomes of Consultations

Consultations were held with a wide range of organisations as part of the process. These consultations had a general impact on the proposed policies but, in particular, their outcomes can be classified as follows –

Plans for the provision of additional facilities

A number of organisations have plans or intentions to provide or facilitate the provision of additional substantial facilities. These include –

- Limerick City Regeneration in respect of Multi-Sport Facilities in the Moyross and Southhill areas
- The University of Limerick with regard to the provision of additional facilities at the UL Arena
- Limerick Institute of Technology which has intentions of providing additional facilities to serve its Limerick City Campuses
- Limerick FC which has plans to provide a large-scale training facility for underage players and the re-development of Market's Field as a small-scale stadium

Others envisaged the provision of additional facilities to serve a wide population including the Clare FA which envisages the provision of all-weather facilities in Shannon.

Other organisations indicated that there was a possibility that new developments might take place but that there were no specific plans with respect to such developments.

Other organisations did not envisage any further development of a substantial nature in the short-to-medium term.

Adequacy of existing provision

A number of organisations considered that the existing provision within the area and the surrounding counties was adequate for current purposes. This related, in particular, to horse-racing and greyhound racing provision. Both organisations indicated that there was adequate spare capacity within the current facilities and that any growth in demand could be adequately addressed by the existing facilities.

No organisation which was consulted suggested that there was over-provision of facilities though it was acknowledged that with respect to some facilities such as public swimming pools, their survival was dependent on continued public subvention.

Some organisations that were responsible for multi-sport facilities also indicated that maintaining the viability of such facilities required considerable management flexibility and the use of the facilities for non-sporting but profitable purposes.

Organisational Issues

Organisational issues arose regularly in the course of consultations. These related to a wide range of issues but amongst those that arose on more than one occasion were those set out below. It became clear during the course of the discussion that organisational and operational issues were as important as the question of the provision of the facilities themselves.

- The importance of the provision of access to facilities as well as the provision of the facilities themselves
- The need to provide for all age-groups from the young to the older populations
- The need to make specific provision for those that have particular needs including those with disabilities
- The importance of including local communities in the design and operation of facilities so that there is local ownership and buy-in and so that local communities feel a responsibility in the provision of facilities
- The importance of the use of multi-sport models for the provision of facilities at a community level which also reflects current Government policy
- The importance of good governance and the enhancement of the capacity of local organisations that own facilities and potential facilities in order to ensure that they are in a position to maximise the manner in which the facilities are used
- The importance of the provision of facilities for non-team and non-invasive sports as well as those for team sports

- The importance of the establishment of community-based, inter-organisational structures to manage facilities in a particular area in a co-ordinated and integrated way.

Economic and social role of sport and physical recreation

It was noted by a number of those consulted that sport and physical recreation had a significant role to play in enhancing social life and in providing opportunities for economic activity within the area. This was particularly related to the role of sport in physical recreation in attracting tourists and other visitors to the area and in encouraging them to make use of the various facilities, both natural and built, that the area has to offer.

The contribution that sports and recreation facilities make to employment in the study area was also recognised.

Review of Gaps and Over-Provision

It was one of the objectives of the strategy that a review would be carried out of gaps and over-provision. However, in many cases it is difficult to be precise about those facilities that are adequate, overly-provided or under-provided. Adequacy of provision is also related to accessibility as well as to location; in some cases certain sectors of the population are excluded from participation, in some cases physical access or the facilities to accommodate such access is the issue, while in other cases geographic distance is the issue.

The strategic approach considers the extent of provision of certain large-scale facilities and identifies those that are adequate for present purposes. In this regard, when account is taken of the availability of many types of facility the study area seems well provided for.

However, the adequacy of provision at a more local or community level is more difficult to assess. The strategy suggests that this will need to be done on a case by case basis and in the context of the tiered approach to facility provision that is identified in the strategy.

The extent of gaps and over-provision is complicated in the context of Limerick and Clare by the nature of the mechanisms through which facilities in Ireland have tended to be provided in the past and by the additional demand for certain facilities that come from the significant foreign and domestic tourism activity in the area.

With regard to the Irish mechanisms for the provision of facilities, a significantly higher proportion of this has been done through individual sporting organisations than has tended to be the case in other countries. Reports on the European and UK models of provision suggest that a far higher proportion of these facilities are provided by public bodies and by education institutions than is the norm in Ireland. In Ireland many facilities have been provided for the exclusive use of individual clubs and other organisations even if the facility is not fully utilised by that organisation. In addition, a substantial amount of voluntary effort is used in running and managing such facilities, so it is difficult to be certain as to the population required in order to make them viable.

With regard to visitors to the area, they are particularly interested in using specific types of facilities and, while many of the activities favoured by visitors such as walking, hiking and cycling do not require the provision of major, capital-intensive facilities, some activities such as golf do require such

facilities. It is likely that there is an over-provision of such facilities in Limerick and Clare based on the needs of the local population alone but that these facilities remain viable based on their use by visitors to the area.

Strategic Approach

The strategic approach was developed taking into account the following –

- The information gathered and evaluated
- The outcomes of the consultations
- Existing plans and strategies

Implementing the Strategy

It is recognised that the strategy will be of no significance if it is not implemented. A number of key implementation steps are identified. While public and publicly funded bodies are seen as the key partners in this exercise, the implementation of the strategy is to some extent the responsibility of all stake holders.

Amongst the initial implementation steps identified are the following –

1. Each Planning Authority should decide how to adopt and implement the policies contained in the strategy and carry out the steps necessary to implement that decision. Consideration should be given as to how the Strategy can be used as a guidance document by the Planning Authority in the context of other Regional Strategies such as the Retail and Housing Strategies.
2. The Regional Authority should consider the extent to which the policies contained in this strategy should be reflected in the Regional Planning Guidelines and should take steps to accommodate them if necessary in those Guidelines.
3. The public bodies responsible for the local development of sports and physical recreation, and in particular the Local Authorities, Local Development Companies and Local Sports Partnerships should establish local forums to consider how the policies contained in this strategy should be implemented. The initial tasks of these local forums should include the following where relevant –
 - a. To identify the most appropriate locations for the major multi-sport facilities identified as being required in the Limerick Metropolitan Area
 - b. To identify the centres which should form the basis of the 20 km and 10 km catchment structure
 - c. To identify the facilities that should be included at the three levels of centre (20 km, 10 km and community) referred to in the strategy
 - d. To develop guidelines for the establishment of collaborative community structures for the integrated provision and management of facilities as referred to at (b)

- e. To develop and promote guidelines for the provision of facilities in a manner that will facilitate use by all members of the community including the young, older people, people with disabilities and those without the financial resources to access pay facilities
 - f. To develop a good practice guideline for the structure and management of those organisations that are involved in these collaborative community processes
 - g. To engage with the providers of private facilities and to examine ways in which such facilities could be made more available to the community in general
4. Each Local Authority should develop a protocol regarding the provision of funding by it to sports and physical recreation development proposals and the conditions under which such provision should be made.
 5. Each Local Authority should develop a protocol regarding the provision of endorsement by it to sports and physical recreation development proposals seeking funding from others and the conditions under which such provision should be made.
 6. Each Local Authority should carry out a review of the tenure and usage of land under its control that has been assigned to bodies responsible for the provision of sports and physical recreation facilities in the context of the policies contained in this strategy and the good practice guidelines referred to at 3 above, and should consider amending the nature and conditions of the tenure depending on the outcome of that review.
 7. Each other public and publicly funded body with a funding remit should develop a protocol regarding the provision of funding by it to sports and physical recreation development proposals and the conditions under which such provision should be made.
 8. Each public and publicly-funded body should develop a protocol regarding the provision of endorsement by it to sports and physical recreation development proposals seeking funding from others and the conditions under which such provision should be made.
 9. Each Local Authority and other provider of infrastructure should develop a mechanism to ensure that the potential of infrastructure projects to deliver sports and physical recreation facilities is considered as part of the design process

Impact of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Habitats Directive Assessment Screening

As noted earlier, an SEA and HDA Screening were carried out by Limerick Institute of Technology for Clare County Council, Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council as part of the development of this strategy. The outcome of the SEA was to suggest that all of the policies were appropriate provided certain conditions are complied with. The following conditions are also part of the policy, therefore, and must be taken into account when specific actions are being considered in the context of the strategy.

1. The major centres identified for sport and recreation growth have or will require waste-water treatment systems that discharge to river systems. Many of these systems contain Natura 2000 Sites that would be vulnerable to inadequately treated waste-water discharges. Therefore, policies for the development of sport and recreation in such areas must be contingent on the provision of waste-water treatment systems with a capacity to produce waste water discharges of a standard that will not impact negatively on downstream Natura 2000 Sites. Where a development cannot be shown not to have a negative impact even with mitigation measures being adopted, then the development cannot be permitted except in the very unusual circumstances of an Imperative Reason of Overriding Public Interest being involved;
2. In addition to the impact from waste-water sport and recreation developments may have other negative implications for Natura 2000 Sites. These implications may be related to the physical destruction of a habitat, the impact of air emissions, the impact of traffic, noise and other general activities and light pollution. No sport and recreation policy shall be adopted or development permitted unless it can be demonstrated through the carrying out of an EHDA that the development will not impact negatively on a Natura 2000 Site or that where such an impact is likely it can be mitigated satisfactorily. Where a development cannot be shown not to have a negative impact even with mitigation measures being adopted, then the development cannot be permitted except in the very unusual circumstances of an Imperative Reason of Overriding Public Interest being involved;
3. Developments associated with rural sport and recreation may have implications for Natura 2000 Sites either because of the activity, footfall and general habitat disturbance associated with their development or due to ancillary services such as water abstraction, waste-water discharge or traffic associated with them. In the case of Natura 2000 Sites no permission should be granted for any specific development unless and until an adequate assessment, including, where necessary an Extended HDA has been carried out and such assessment has concluded that the policy or project will have no detrimental impact on the site in question or that adequate mitigating measures are possible. Where a development cannot be shown not to have a negative impact even with mitigation measures being adopted, then the development cannot be permitted except in the very unusual circumstances of an Imperative Reason of Overriding Public Interest being involved;
4. Even where Natura 2000 Sites are not impacted on, any development of sport and recreation should be contingent on the effluent arising from it being such that it will not impact on any waste-water treatment system whether private or public, that will prevent

that system discharging a final effluent that meets the requirements of the appropriate River Basin District Management Plans;

5. Even where Natura 2000 Sites are not impacted on, any development or activity associated with sport and recreation, should be contingent upon its not impacting negatively on the natural environment, as defined in Section 3.1.3 above, and no such development or activity should be permitted until it has been demonstrated that such is the case or that mitigation measures adequate to address the impacts can be implemented;
6. Rural sport and recreation developments may be proposed in areas without a piped waste-water collection and treatment system and this has implications for the quality of groundwater in the region. The RBD analyses have identified areas within the region where the quality of the ground-water is not adequate. Any development that requires the provision of a private treatment system should be considered in the context of the following:
 - The quality of the groundwater into which the effluent will discharge and the need to preserve or improve that quality;
 - The quality of the effluent proposed to be discharged from the waste-water treatment process;
 - The quantity of the effluent proposed to be discharged;
 - The capacity of the ground to enhance the quality of the final effluent;
 - Proposals for the management and maintenance of the treatment system;
 - The capacity of the Local Authority to monitor the quality of the discharge.

No development should take place until it has been demonstrated that the quality of the groundwater will not be impaired as a result of the development.

7. Areas that contain or are designated as Natura 2000 sites are also liable to exhibit some of the technical characteristics that would facilitate the development of high-quality facilities particularly associated with activities such as cycling, walking, hiking or mountain-biking. No policies should be adopted or permission granted for developments liable to impact on a Natura 2000 Site unless and until an Extended HDA has concluded that the proposed development would not have a negative impact on such a site or that mitigation measures which would eliminate such impacts can be identified and applied.
8. As noted above, in implementing this strategy, full regard must be had to the requirements of the Habitats Directive including the carrying out of an assessment of the implications for any Natura 2000 Site that might be at risk from any proposed development. While all Natura 2000 Sites are of key importance, a number have particular importance as they contain species that are of particular relevance as indicators of environmental quality.

A key species in this regard is the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel and particular care must be taken that activities do not pose a threat to species such as this, whether they lie within or

without the area of the strategy. Where such an impact is identified the development must be mitigated or, where that is not possible must not be implemented unless the procedure relating to developments of Overriding National Importance has been completed.

This consideration applies to developments in the following areas –

- Those that involve discharges to the Cloon River;
 - Those that involve discharge to the Blackwater River or its tributaries.
9. In considering the management of flood risk regard should be to current flooding risks and the impact of climate change on existing defences and on the flood risk of any proposed development.
 10. In addition, in considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to a waste-water treatment demand, the likely cumulative impact of such demands that are liable to arise from any source shall be considered and no policy shall be adopted or development permitted that would result in the capacity of the area's waste water treatment system to be exceeded by the cumulative demands of successive developments.
 11. Finally, in considering the impact of any proposed policy or project that is liable to give rise to impacts on a Natura 2000 Site, the likely cumulative effect of such impacts that are liable to arise from any source shall be considered and no policy shall be adopted or development permitted that would result in the deterioration of the site's habitat status either by itself or cumulatively with other developments or activities.

The Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy, does not identify areas or sites for development that are sufficiently specific to permit or require a detailed assessment of their impact on any Natura 2000 site. Such assessments, where necessary, should be carried out when a specific project is being considered. However, the general environmental conditions incorporated in the strategy provide adequate protection to Natural 2000 sites.