



**ICS**

Innovation &  
Consultancy Services



# The Northern Ireland Football Fund

## Literature Review and Horizon Scan

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>8</b>
1. Health	8
Health benefits derived from providing community access to sports facilities	9
Health benefits of physical activity	9
Mental health impacts	10
Community Sport and Physical Activity Hubs	10
The use of sporting facilities around the globe	11
Initiatives in Northern Ireland	12
Player welfare	13
Impact on loneliness	13
2. Society and Inclusion	14
Society	14
Inclusion	15
Community Engagement	15
Social and inclusion benefits derived from providing community access to sports facilities	15
Rural community benefits	21
3. Economic	22
Economic Return on Investment	22
Social Return on Investment	23
The SROI model	23
Sport England	24
Sport New Zealand	25
Fife Council	26
Sport Wales	27
Walk Glasgow	27
Girls are on the Soccer Field program, Turkey	28
North Lanarkshire Leisure	28
Active Communities Network (London)	28
A health valuation of sport and physical activity in Canada	29
Australian Football League (AFL) Victoria	29
Street Soccer Academy (UK)	29
North Yorkshire Sport	29
Black Country 'BeActive' Partnership	30

Manchester Sport and Leisure Trust (MLST).....	30
UEFA GROW SROI model.....	31
Irish Football Association (IFA).....	31
Spartans Community Football Academy (Scotland) .....	31
Scottish Football Association.....	32
Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) .....	32
Finland.....	33
Italian FA (FIGC) .....	33
Football Association of Ireland .....	34
Australian Sports Commission. ....	35
Using a sport to improve the use of urban space to enable community growth, economic and health benefits.....	36
Enhanced Revenue Streams .....	36
Activities to help clubs become more sustainable. ....	37
Fundraising ideas.....	37
Booking and hiring .....	39
Benefits of 5 a side pitches for training and youth development.....	41
MLS initiatives.....	41
4. Best Practice .....	42
Corporate Social responsibility.....	42
Sustainability.....	43
Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Practices.....	43
Sustainable pitches.....	45
NIFL working group.....	45
Renewables .....	46
Green football weekend .....	46
Harnessing New Technologies .....	46
Examples of new innovative facilities to support clubs to train and produce talent .....	47
Transforming urban spaces case studies .....	47
Innovative Soccer spaces .....	48
Using social media.....	49
Useful sites to follow on Social media .....	49
Some website resources for clubs .....	49
Resources relating to community and facility building projects.....	51
Co-designing new facilities with communities.....	52
New facilities community consultation case studies .....	53
Best practice for running an infrastructure project .....	53

Volunteering.....	53
Northern Ireland specific material.....	54
Parking and traffic congestion .....	55
Examples of innovative Parking solutions .....	56
Traffic management .....	56
Sport for development and peace .....	56
Research on youth behaviours and barriers.....	57
<b>In summation.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix i – Toolkits and guides.....</b>	<b>59</b>

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## Document Summary

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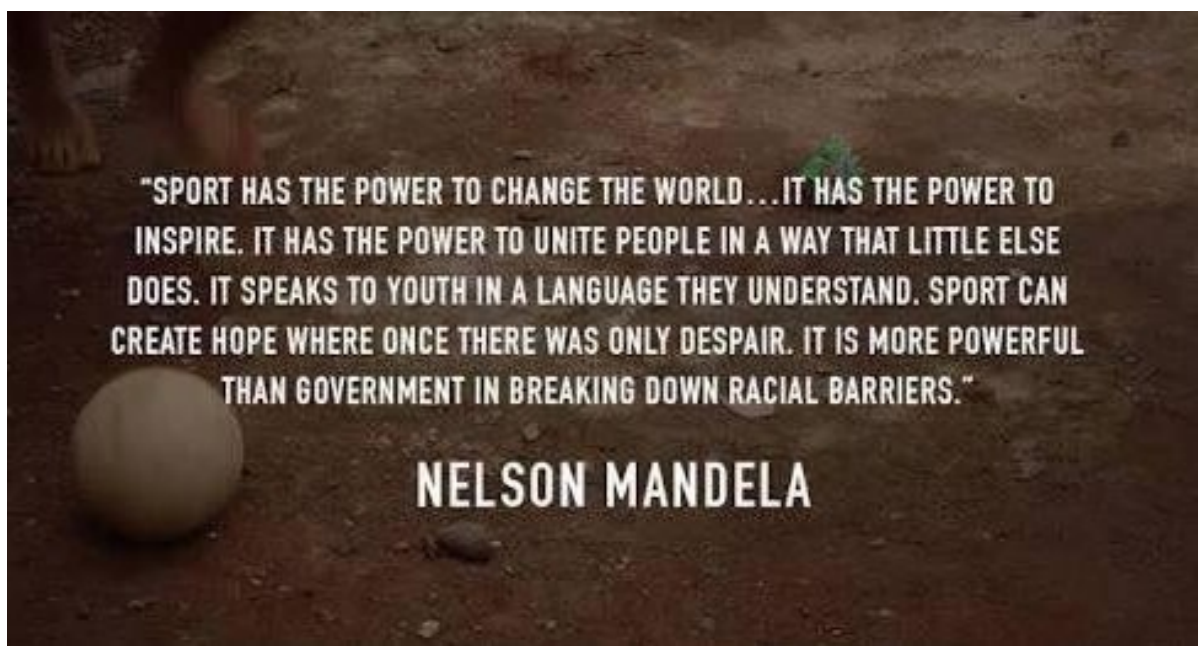
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# Introduction

The Northern Ireland Football Fund (TNIFF) was launched in May 2024 by the Minister for Communities, who outlined a commitment to modernising footballing facilities at every level in communities across Northern Ireland. As part of the programme of work, the Department for Communities (DfC) commissioned the Department of Finance's (DoF) Innovation and Consultancy Services (ICS) to carry out user research to understand the current experiences of the community in regard to; its relationship with football, the local performance clubs, their facilities and to understand how other such facilities have been developed and utilised across the globe. As part of this project, ICS agreed to conduct a Literature Review and Horizon Scanning exercise.

This report contains the findings of that exercise, which was conducted between July and November 2024 and is structured in line with the high-level outcomes defined in the DfC strategic outline business case, namely:

- Health;
- Society and Inclusion;
- Economy; and
- Best practice.



# Context

All of the information contained in this report has been sourced either from academic literature, case studies, video archives, websites or written articles and blogs. The information contained is aimed at providing an overview of the landscape of sports organisations across the globe that are working to improve facilities at their clubs and for their members whilst also aiming to deliver health, social, economic and environmental benefits to their wider communities.

# Findings

## 1. Health

One of the outcome deliverables referred to in the Sub-Regional Programme strategic outline business case is *to drive participation in physical activity through football which contributes to positive physical and mental health outcomes*. As part of this research, researchers have identified examples of initiatives introduced by sports clubs around the globe that enable communities to use sporting facilities to improve health outcomes.

It is an established fact that regular physical activity delivers numerous health benefits. In the UK the Chief Medical Officer recommends that individuals should be active daily and aim to [undertake a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity](#) over the course of a week. However, in 2016 [the lack of physical activity](#) was costing the UK an estimated £7.4 billion a year, including £0.9 billion to the NHS alone.

Low physical activity is one of the top 10 causes of disease and disability in England. Persuading inactive people (those doing less than 30 minutes per week) to become more active could prevent one in ten cases of stroke and heart disease in the UK and one in six deaths from any cause. In fact, it's often said that if physical activity was a drug, it would be classed as a wonder drug.

Regular physical activity can help to prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions and diseases, many of which are on the rise and affecting people at an earlier age; 1 in 3 of the working age population have at least 1 long term condition and 1 in 7 have more than one.

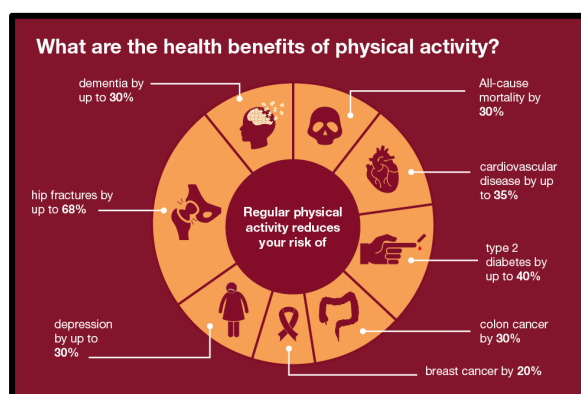


Fig. 1. How much physical activity should you do?



Fig. 2. What are the health benefits?

Physical activity can also boost mental wellbeing and help reduce social isolation, a risk factor for depression. The link between physical activity and depression is well established with [one study](#) finding that people who are inactive have three times the rate of moderate to severe depression of active people. Other positive outcomes of physical activity include:

- a sense of purpose and value;
- a better quality of life;
- improved sleep; and
- reduced stress.



## Health benefits derived from providing community access to sports facilities

Our research has highlighted a number of health benefits that enabling access to sports facilities can deliver. These include:

- Encouraging more people to engage in regular physical activity, reducing the risk of chronic diseases and reducing obesity. [A report from the Office for National Statistics](#) has shown that where there are more sports facilities per 10,000 people, a greater proportion of adults are active for over two and a half hours per week.
- Significantly contributing to combating obesity, especially in under served communities.
- Enabling regular participation in sports and physical activities has a positive impact on mental well-being. [A research paper](#) from the Mental Health Foundation found it can reduce the risk of depression by up to 30%
- Helping to strengthen social bonds, which are critical for overall mental and emotional health.
- Leading to substantial savings in healthcare expenditures.
- Long-term access to physical activity through sports clubs contributes to a longer, healthier life for community members. A paper published in the [Journal of Aging Research](#) found that the relative risk of death is approximately 20% to 35% lower in physically active and fit persons compared to that in inactive and unfit persons.

## Health benefits of physical activity

The [Mental Health Foundation](#) published research findings for Northern Ireland in relation to [physical activity](#) and how moving more is good for our mental health. Some of the key findings are:

- More than half (52%) of adults in Northern Ireland feel that their mental health and wellbeing can be improved through physical activity.
- Over a third (38%) of adults in Northern Ireland find it challenging to allocate time for physical activity. Additionally, a quarter of individuals (25%) report being too busy to exercise in a typical week.
- Around one in six survey respondents (17%) said that high costs stopped them from moving more.
- One in six people (17%) said that a long-term condition or disability prevented them from doing more physical activity. This rises to more than one quarter of respondents aged 50-64 (28%).
- Other people found that body image and cultural barriers stopped them from doing physical activity.

The research also asked respondents what would help them be more physically active. There is potential for clubs to provide solutions to a few of the barriers identified in this chart.

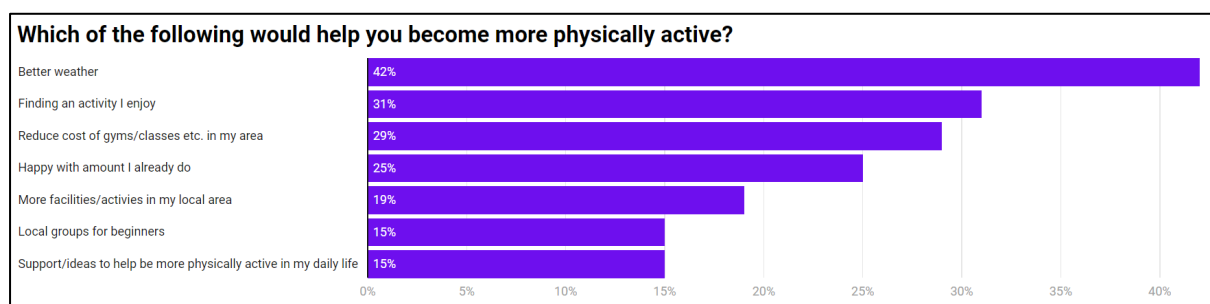


Fig. 3. Barriers to undertaking physical activity.

The sport and recreation alliance produced a report entitled '[Physical activity and health Working together to get the nation moving](#)' that includes a recommendation that organisations make the most of local facilities by opening them up to communities and providing inclusive opportunities that engage under-represented groups.

## Mental health impacts

The key findings in the academic paper published in 2023 entitled '[The impact of sports participation on mental health and social outcomes in adults: a systematic review and the 'Mental Health through Sport' conceptual model](#)' confirm that participation in sport of any form (team or individual) is beneficial for improving mental health and social outcomes amongst adults. Team sports, however, may provide more potent and additional benefits for mental and social outcomes across adulthood.

One example is 'Rugby League Cares', where there is an area of their website dedicated to [community](#) and they strive to help those in rugby league communities live happy, healthy and rewarding lives. They have a particular focus on mental health and have a successful, award winning 'Offload' programme and initiatives.

## Community Sport and Physical Activity Hubs

The Community Sport and Physical Activity Hubs (CSH) in Ireland was funded by Sport Ireland through the Dormant Accounts Fund and delivered by a network of Local Sports Partnerships in partnership with local communities. A Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub is a collective of progressive sports clubs and other local organisations that want to work together to improve the sport offered in their local community. A hub will provide information, support and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for people in disadvantaged areas to get involved and engage in a more active and healthier lifestyle.

In their [2019 evaluation report](#) for the project the findings indicate that project inputs and outputs have resulted in:

- Increased access to sport and physical activity opportunities, delivered in welcoming and safe environments to people that face multiple disadvantages;
- Improved links between local organisations;
- Enhancement in skills and capacities; and anecdotally
- Improved health and social outcomes for people.

These outcomes align with the original intention for the CSHs and enable a conclusion that the CSHs are positive investments in local communities. The inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes are captured and summarised in this CSHs logic model.

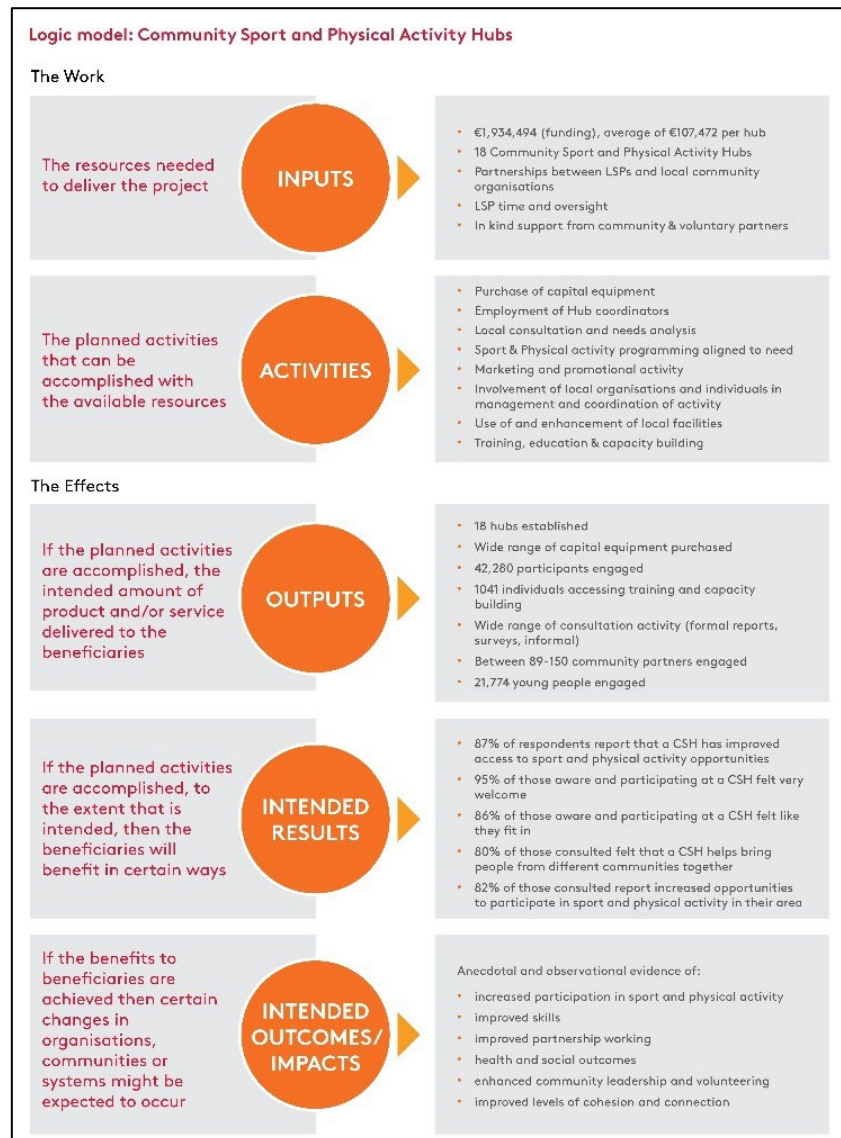


Fig. 4. Community Sport and Physical Activity Hubs logic model.

## The use of sporting facilities around the globe

Our research has identified numerous examples of the use of sports club facilities by the community which have a beneficial impact on health and well-being. These have been collated into the following list:

- **Health and well-being programmes** – [clubs have hosted health screenings, fitness assessments, and wellness seminars](#), promoting healthier lifestyles among community members.
- **Mobile health clinics** - the Miami Dolphins partnered with local healthcare providers to host "[Miami Dolphins Health and Wellness Expos](#)," offering free health screenings and wellness resources to the community.
- **Fitness classes** – clubs [make facilities available for hire](#) for events such as yoga, Pilates, and boot camps, allowing community members to stay active.

- **Culinary workshops** - clubs offer [culinary workshops](#), teaching healthy cooking techniques and promoting local cuisine.
- **Mindfulness workshops/retreats** - organise [mindfulness workshop/retreats](#) and meditation sessions, promoting mental well-being and stress relief, as shown in this [‘wellness for children’](#) video from Tottenham Hotspurs.
- **Art therapy workshops** – San Fransico 49ers hosted a [‘Crucial Catch Art Therapy Event’](#), benefiting community members battling all types of cancer.
- **Elderly Activities** - [creating a social hub for older adults](#) to help to tackle loneliness, increase physical activity and enhance social interactions using the power of a football club to generate demand.
- **Community tournaments** - in 2017 the Shanghai Table Tennis Association hosted a [table tennis tournament for seniors](#) (i.e. 55 years or older). This tournament has become a platform for them to work out their bodies and make friends with people of similar ages, background and interests.
- **Health education workshops** – clubs become health promoting hubs [offering spaces for community meetings and workshops](#) on health topics benefiting community members of all ages. There is a [World Health Organisation toolkit](#) providing advice and guidance to clubs who may wish to become a health hub.
- **Sporting memories programmes** - The Alzheimer Society’s in both the UK and Ireland have [a number of initiatives](#), [awareness and support programmes](#) which aims to tackle isolation, depression, and loneliness in safe and friendly environments. [Enabling people with dementia to reminisce](#) about sport can help people revisit vivid memories to help combat the effects of dementia, depression and loneliness. You can see how to partner with the organisation and the benefits for the community via their [website](#).

## Initiatives in Northern Ireland

Researchers uncovered a number of initiatives that are currently available in Northern Ireland that relate to the use of football and football facilities to deliver health benefits. The uptake of these initiatives is not known to the research team however they are provided for information:

- **Walking Football** - Walking football is aimed at keeping men and women aged over 50 active and involved in football. The IFA [promotes walking football](#) with contact details on the page for the various [programmes across the province](#). It is used to get the older generation back into team sports which have several positive benefits on [health, wellbeing and isolation](#).
- **Danderball** - Danderball is the use of Walking football to engage and increase participation in men and women over the age of 50. Danderball is facilitated by the Community Sports Network.
- **Man V Fat Football** – is a grassroots initiative [combining football with weight loss support](#) for men, focusing on health and fitness. A [Belfast club](#) was established in 2023 and play at the Blanchflower Playing Fields and Avoneil leisure centre.
- **Street Soccer NI** - [Street Soccer NI](#) is a charity set up for the disadvantaged groups of society such as the homeless, people with addictions, mental health issues, ex prisoners, refugees, asylum seekers and long term unemployed. They aim to bring positive change to people’s lives using football. They run weekly sessions in Belfast,

Coleraine, Derry/Londonderry, Bangor and Downpatrick including women's football and learning disability football.

- **FC Mindwell** - [FC Mindwell](#) is a men's football team in Northern Ireland that uses football to raise awareness of mental health issues, especially in men. The club was launched in 2020 and is the first UK football club to focus solely on mental health. FC Mindwell's philosophy is to break the taboo around mental health and to encourage men to speak out about their struggles.
- **Futsal** - In essence [Futsal](#) is a simple game that at recreational level can be played anywhere. It is promoted by the IFA in Northern Ireland with teams ranging from grassroots level to international. It is a great way to stay fit, and it also offers [numerous benefits for physical and mental health](#).

## Player welfare

The Rugby League Cares organisation is an independent charity that plays an important role in the field of player welfare: it [supports players at the end of their careers](#) when they make the transition to life after rugby, providing education and training grants that will equip them with the skills and qualifications they need for the next stage of their lives.

## Impact on loneliness

A paper published by Frontiers in Public Health in relation to '[Attending live sporting events predicts subjective wellbeing and reduces loneliness](#)' finds that attendance at live sporting events has positive associations with some aspects of subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction and a sense of life being worthwhile) and loneliness. Loneliness has been described as a "modern behavioural epidemic". They conclude that attendance at live sporting events may still offer a scalable, accessible and effective means of improving the public's wellbeing and reducing loneliness.

## 2. Society and Inclusion

Another two deliverable outcomes referred to in the Sub-Regional Programme strategic outline business case are that:

- The flagship Sub-Regional Programme commitment will elevate pride in Northern Ireland and capture the public imagination; and
- New and refurbished football facilities will contribute to positive outcomes for inclusion of underrepresented groups.

### Society

Government investment in sports facilities has played a crucial role in elevating national pride and fostering a sense of unity within a country or region throughout history. By committing resources to the development and enhancement of sports infrastructure, governments recognise sports as a vital component of cultural identity and community cohesion. Investments in sporting facilities serve as both physical and symbolic landmarks which provide spaces in which to play sports but also to become rallying points for communities, where people come together, celebrate achievements and share in the collective experience of sport. Moreover, the long-term benefits of such investments are far-reaching, contributing to social cohesion, national unity, and the overall well-being of the population. In this way, government investment in sports facilities is not just about building physical structures; it is about building a stronger, more unified nation. Here are two well known, global examples.

**London, Olympics 2012** – Chapter 5 (p54) of their 2016 report '[Inspired by 2012: the legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games](#)' reports on bringing communities together and evidences the aims and achievements that resulted as a legacy of the 2012 games. In her foreword, then Prime Minister Teresa May, referred to *"the wonderful spirit of national pride we felt during those weeks."* The event rejuvenated East London, increased sports participation nationwide, and is considered one of the most successful Olympics in modern history.

**South Africa, World Cup 2010** – In section 7.1 - Intangible Legacy, of the '[2010 Fifa World Cup country report](#)' it was evidenced that 91% of South Africans believed that the event united the people of South Africa. Another insight found was that the World Cup also served as a catalyst for encouraging inclusivity in the sport, because it had, in the past, been seen as a poor and/or black person's sport. After the 2010 World Cup, there was a broader interest, heightened awareness and a growing appreciation of football in the country. This has been visible in the local game with many white supporters now attending soccer matches in large numbers.

However, there is no guarantee that investment in facilities alone will deliver the societal benefits. There are some high-profile examples that demonstrate that public spending on infrastructure can fail where there is a lack of sustainable planning, poor design of the facilities or poor economic foresight. These can lead to negative societal benefits being realised, for example,

**Athens 2004, Olympic games** - The truth is that Greek citizen still do not know the exact final cost of this event and there exist no official publication about the expenditure in detail.



In his paper [‘The legacies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games: a bitter–sweet burden’](#) Roy Panagiotopoulou states that,

*‘there were only very hazy plans for the utilisation of each venue (Ioannou et al., 2004; Kissoudi, 2008). The only construction that was offered for citizen’s use directly after the Games (October 2004) was the Olympic Village, which became a residential area and was given after lottery to 2,229 families with low incomes.’*

## Inclusion

In today's increasingly diverse society, social inclusion is more important than ever. Social inclusion refers to the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, or economic status. One powerful yet often underappreciated tool for fostering social inclusion is access to well-funded sports facilities. When governments allocate resources to build and maintain these facilities, they are not just investing in physical infrastructure, they are investing in the social fabric of their communities.

Sports have an unparalleled ability to bring people together across different social, economic, and cultural divides. Sports create spaces where individuals from all walks of life can come together, interact, and build relationships. These activities foster a sense of belonging, teamwork, and mutual respect, which are crucial for social cohesion.

An example of this is the [Equality, diversity and inclusion plan](#) from Premiership Rugby in England, which states they are committed to ensuring that inclusivity is at the heart of everything they do, it is critical to their evolution and the diversifying of the sport. They believe this will enable greater access to the game, a more equitable experience all around and a greater diversity of talent being represented at the top of rugby union.

## Community Engagement

The Football Foundation provides advice and guidance to clubs on [community engagement](#), they also have a toolkit for clubs working with local people to create successful community football projects.

In his article [10 ways to build an inclusive community sports club](#), Steve Dillon outlines key steps and approaches that he believes clubs need to undertake to ensure they are the beating hearts of their communities. Although the focus of the article is on New Zealand the approaches can all be adopted in Northern Ireland. One key observation he makes is,

*‘The commercial value of being connected to your community is obvious, but the social impact is where the real gold lies.’*

## Social and inclusion benefits derived from providing community access to sports facilities

Our research has highlighted numerous social and inclusion benefits that enabling access to sports facilities can deliver, alongside examples of where these benefits have been realised. These include:

- **Social Inclusion** - Well-designed sports facilities provide opportunities for all community members, regardless of age, gender, or ability, to participate in sports, fostering inclusion and equality. For example:
  - Hockey Victoria in Australia host an '[All Abilities Hockey](#)' program, providing inclusive field hockey opportunities for people with disabilities. Participants engage in modified games and skill-building exercises tailored to their abilities, promoting physical activity and social inclusion.
  - The Premier League in England fund "[Kicks](#)" programs which offers free football sessions for young people in high-need areas. Its aim is to use football among other sports and activities including youth voice, workshops and social action initiatives, to bring communities together and engage with young people, getting to youngsters who had previously proven difficult to reach and guiding them towards a range of healthy and constructive activities.
  - The IFA have in the past supported [Anti-bullying week](#) by encouraging clubs to challenge bullying and sharing videos and resources that clubs can use to identify bullying behaviour and undertake activities.
  - Seattle Sounders have a [Social impact](#) section on their club website which contains links to case studies on fighting racism, protecting the planet and equality.
  - While the focus of most sports clubs tends to be on playing members, don't forget about those who may have been a part of your club but might not be able to contribute in the same way. Likewise, there will be older people in your area who haven't been involved with the club but would appreciate a social outlet on a regular basis in a friendly environment.
  - Residents living in the Belfast City Council area can access programmes from the 'Stadium Community Benefits Initiative'. The Initiative focuses on maximising the potential of the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park to deliver social benefits. Here is a [video](#) outlining some of the excellent work that has been delivered to date. The overarching objective of the initiative is to improve the quality of life now and for future generations, especially those who are socially marginalised and excluded across the city. A list of [upcoming activities](#) are available on the Belfast City Council website.
- **Youth Development** - Sports facilities offer a constructive outlet for young people, promoting discipline, teamwork and leadership skills that are valuable in life and career development. For example:
  - Data from [The Aspen Institute](#) shows that clubs allowing community access to facilities see a marked increase in youth engagement in sports programs, while specific percentages may vary by region and program, the general trend shows that increased access to sports facilities and organised programs leads to higher engagement, particularly among low-income and marginalized youth.
  - FC United of Manchester run a community programme entitled '[FC United - Football & Community United.](#)' and is varied and not exclusive to football or sport. They offer lots of youth activities such as an [activity camp](#) during half term where they provide those attending with a hot meal and refreshments.
  - The IFA have a [number of initiatives](#) that provide access to football and footballing facilities for young people in Northern Ireland.



- Ebbsfleet United shared an example of how external stakeholders have hired use of their facilities to [host workshops for local charity events](#) that helps develop a range of skills among young people in Years 11 and 12.
  - Buxton FC foundation detail on their [webpage](#) how they are working to make football accessible to all local families, subsidising fees and kit costs, which would otherwise be a barrier to taking part. They raise money through a range of charity events, as well as grants and one-off donations from supporters.
  - [Design FC](#) is a youth design organisation that teaches creative thinking, self-expression, and autobiographical storytelling through the design of sport jerseys / apparel. It provides free, high quality after school programming to youth in under-resourced school districts in the USA.
- **Crime Reduction** - By engaging youth and providing structured activities, sports facilities can help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in communities. For example:
    - In their report '[The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach](#)', Witt & Caldwell found that participation in out-of-school time programs contribute to reducing juvenile delinquency. On Page 9 they stated that a 2002 survey of California's mayors and chambers of commerce found that 80% of respondents believed that recreation areas and programs reduce crime and juvenile delinquency in their communities.; There is further growing evidence to show that sports programmes can have a high impact on [keeping individuals safe from involvement in crime and violence](#).
    - Street games UK have used sport to enhance positive outcomes for vulnerable young people in [the context of youth crime](#). The funds supported 220 voluntary and community sports organisations to carry out targeted work supporting children and young people who were at risk of entering the criminal justice system.
  - **Community Cohesion** - Shared sports facilities bring people together, strengthening community bonds and fostering a sense of belonging. For example:
    - A recent study conducted by the Sport and Recreation Alliance in partnership with physical activity consumer insight specialist Active Insights found that [68% of individuals surveyed believed](#) that community sports clubs and groups play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community in their area.
    - [Cricket builds hope](#) in Rwanda is an example of an organisation who run programmes that deliver social cohesion by focusing on inclusion, unity and a sense of community.
    - The MLS in USA have an initiative to create a '[Community MVP](#)' which recognises the work of volunteers and community outreach staff across the league. This provides insight into the number and breadth of community activities that are being delivered by clubs across America.
    - A group of volunteers look after the external gardens at [FC united of Manchester](#). Its a great way for community members to be active, learn new skills and help keep the ground and community looking at its best. They also have a [community allotment](#) nestled within their grounds. This green space is dedicated to bringing people together to grow their own produce, share gardening tips, and foster a sense of belonging.

- **Cultural Integration** - Sports facilities can serve as multicultural hubs where people from diverse backgrounds interact, promoting cultural understanding and integration. For example:
  - In an article published on Inclusive Sport Design from Australia, they cover how grassroots clubs and sport providers can remove barriers to create more opportunities for everyone and explain [what encourages multicultural involvement in sport](#).
  - [PeacePlayers Northern Ireland](#) was established in 2002 to provide a rare opportunity for Catholic and Protestant youth to form friendships and advocate for reconciliation and shared society. They are a Global Movement of Youth Leaders using Basketball to Create a More Peaceful World. They have a number of programs available on their website. One of the programmes they run, [the interface games](#), involves coaches from football at four camps across Belfast using football facilities.
  - [Football United](#), a part of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) School of Public Health and Community Medicine (SPHCM) have conducted a number of research activities to evaluate the impact of football and sport on social cohesion and community participation of refugee populations in urban areas. Their [research findings](#) have implications for a range of Government Departments, Non-Government Organisations and the Sport Sector as they grapple with the challenges of engaging children and young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Accessibility** - Inclusive sports facilities ensure that people with disabilities have opportunities to participate in physical activities, enhancing their quality of life. For example:
  - The world design organisation in an article '[Designing for diversity: The importance of inclusive design in sports](#)' highlight the value of inclusive design principles being incorporated in the construction of sports facilities to make sure they're accessible to athletes and fans of all abilities.
  - An article by Sport England provides examples of [inclusive design principles](#).
  - The development of Billericay 'Soccability FC' is detailed in this [report](#) which describes how parents in the community worked with Billericay FC to give local children with disabilities the opportunity to play football.
  - The IFA aim to ensure that all disabled people have the opportunity to take part in football activities and are able to fulfil their potential in the area of their choice. Their website provides [information](#), links to resources and clubs on four types of disability football;
    - Learning disability;
    - Cerebral Palsy;
    - Visual Impairment; and
    - Powerchair.
  - [Unified football team](#) - Special Olympics Great Britain teamed up with the University of Hertfordshire to bring together six athletes with intellectual

- disabilities with five current students to form its [Unified Football team](#), which competed at the Berlin 2023 Special Olympics World Games.
- Special Olympics Ireland have [resources](#) on their website regarding unified football and the different variations of the sport. The Special Olympics Ulster branch have contact details on their [website](#).
  - Watford FC have started working on a programme to help their fans with hidden disabilities and have launched a new inclusive website with [‘Recite Me’ assistive technology](#). ‘Recite me’ take a deeper look into [diversity and inclusion](#) in football and explore how improving it across all facets of ‘the beautiful game’ can unite communities of players and fans and cultivate positive attitudes that reach well beyond the boundaries of the pitch.
  - This webinar entitled [‘How to enhance online accessibility and inclusion in sport’](#) shares strategies for engaging with disabled, international and elderly visitors to a club website.
  - Glentoran established a [Disability Football Section in 2016](#). This section is for males and females with a learning and/or physical disability who would find it difficult to play the traditional 11-a-side game in mainstream football. At the beginning numbers were quite limited but the staff and players did a lot of outreach work in the local community within special education and with disability organisations.
  - The Halifax Wanderers from Canada have developed a [‘Football4all’](#) initiative and supporting website which is aimed at making football more accessible to people who live close to the club.
- **Social capital and local identity** - By integrating with the community, sports clubs can become central to the social fabric of the area, strengthening ties and creating a loyal supporter base. Some examples include:
    - Oxford University Government Outcomes Lab paper on [sports club and social impact](#) refers to the example of Lewes FC who embedded a symbiotic relationship between the club and its ‘communities’. [Lewes FC](#) is a 100% community owned football club that aims both to do well on the pitch and do good stuff in the local community. As a club with a ground threatened by flooding they share their [environmental sustainability](#) initiatives aimed at tackling the problem. They also share news on the website which presents articles around [community engagement](#).
    - [Guiseley Community Foundation](#) utilises the power of sport and their brand and ethos Guiseley AFC as a family orientated club to work with partners and the local community to deliver a range of initiatives. The best-known is their popular [holiday football camps](#). These holiday camps have been running ever since the Foundation’s inception, with the camps attracting over 30 children each holiday.
    - FC Tulsa, in collaboration with a local community group organised a [toy drive](#) which encouraged supporters to bring new and gently used toys, books and games to a home match for collection to benefit children fighting illness.
  - **Educational Opportunities** – Collaborating with local schools for educational programs, tours, and workshops can assist in integrating sports and academic learning.

- The Youth Sport Trust's evidence paper – [The Link Between Physical Activity and Attainment in Children and Young People](#) found that physically active children achieve higher levels of academic attainment than their less physically active peers and that organised sports and after-school clubs are associated with higher levels of attainment.
  - Premiership Rugby have an education and employability programme 'Hitz' which is dedicated to helping young people find a better future. They use their brands, staff and stadiums to welcome 14–24-year-olds who need extra support to build personal, life and employability skills. Here is a [video](#) demonstrating the value the programme has delivered.
  - The IFA have [an education and employability programme](#) that is delivered by their officers that is designed to give the participants additional qualifications on top of their academic qualifications. It also aims to provide participants with opportunities to use their qualifications and develop new skills by volunteering and / or working on Irish FA programmes such as holiday camps, coaching in after schools, coaching at local primary schools, doing work experience and getting involved at local clubs. There are some articles on their website about [graduation from 2022](#) and [from 2023](#). The initiatives are delivered in collaboration with schools and colleges. Here is a [video](#) demonstrating the value the programme has delivered.
- **Positive Public Relations and Media Coverage** - Clubs that provide their facilities to the community receive more positive local media coverage. Open access can lead to positive public relations, enhancing the club's image and encouraging broader community support. Some examples include:
    - Cliftonville received positive media coverage of their [house martin mural initiative](#).
  - **Increased Membership and Participation** - When community members have regular access to a club's facilities, they are more likely to become invested in the club, leading to increased membership and participation. Some examples include:
    - The [Project rugby](#) programme is delivered in partnership with Gallagher UK and the RFU in a familiar school setting to help deliver on the aims of increasing participation and developing a lifelong interest in the sport.
    - Steve Dillon has written an article outlining [10 ways your club can become a social champion](#). This talks to the depth of impact all football clubs, from amateur grassroots through to professional, and sports clubs more generally can have on their communities both on and off the field and how this affects their current membership and future generations to come. As such, the importance of becoming a social champion is higher than ever and clubs can make small changes, or start new initiatives, to improve their social impact and ultimately help to increase their membership numbers.
    - [Cray Wanderers](#), one of the oldest football clubs in England, allows local youth teams and schools to use their facilities for training and matches. By engaging local young players and offering affordable community programs, the club has seen an increase in local membership and fan support as families and young athletes become more involved with the club.

- **Volunteerism and Civic Engagement** - The operation of sports teams and events often relies on volunteers, encouraging civic participation and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members.
  - A survey by the Australian Sports Commission found that clubs that regularly hosted community events or provided open access to their facilities reported a 25% increase in volunteerism and local sponsorships.
  - England football have developed a [‘youth leadership and volunteering toolkit’](#) that is aimed at providing young people with the ability to engage in and participate in football through various opportunities. The toolkit explains motivations and barriers young people experience in trying to volunteer in football and how to create meaningful opportunities for them.
- **Entertainment and Recreation** - In rural areas with limited entertainment options, sports facilities provide much needed recreational activities, enhancing the quality of life and offering residents a means of leisure and relaxation.
  - [Dinwiddie Country park](#) in Virginia USA, use their football facilities to bring people into their rural location by hosting a number of different events such as outdoor concerts, country fairs, outdoor movie nights and 5K runs, these events have brought in over 25,000 visitors.
- **Community Resilience** - In times of crisis or change, [sports facilities can serve as centres for communal support and resilience](#), providing a venue for collective activities that can help the community cope with challenges and rebuild. For example:
  - The NFL in America has partnered with the Government disaster response unit FEMA to [repurpose football stadiums into emergency response hubs](#) during natural disasters, offering shelter and medical aid. This collaboration strengthens community resilience and disaster preparedness across the U.S.
- **Skill Development** - Provide coaching clinics and training sessions for aspiring players and coaches from the local area. For example:
  - Manchester United offer [football, volunteering and positive activities for young people](#) in Derry/Londonderry.
- **Community Identity and Pride** - [Access to sports clubs and facilities](#) helps communities develop a strong sense of identity and pride. local sports teams become symbols of local pride, fostering community cohesion and spirit.

## Rural community benefits

An academic paper published in 2019 considered the impact on [‘Rural community well-being through minor league sport’](#). One of its key findings was that residents of the rural community did perceive and feel grateful for their minor league sport team’s Social Return on Investment. Grateful residents experienced higher levels of subjective well-being (happiness, pleasure and satisfaction) as well as enhanced community pride and attachment due to the local sport team’s altruistic and prosocial behaviours.

### 3. Economic

Another of the deliverable outcomes referred to in the Sub-Regional Programme strategic outline business case is *that sustainable football clubs will contribute to a thriving and balanced economy in Northern Ireland*. Our research indicates that investments in football facilities can result in both positive economic and positive social returns. In this section researchers will refer to examples of these as well as providing a list of potential initiatives that local clubs could consider adopting to help them become more sustainable.

#### Economic Return on Investment

Investments in sports facilities across the globe and the UK have shown a measurable economic and social impact, benefiting local communities to provide economic advantages. Investing in local sports facilities offers significant economic returns for communities, enhancing everything from local employment to tourism. These facilities aren't just spaces for athletes; they drive commerce, support small businesses, and often boost property values, creating a ripple effect that can benefit entire regions. Here are some examples:

**Boosting Local Economies Through Job Creation** - Constructing and operating sports facilities create direct employment opportunities, from construction jobs during development to positions in management, maintenance, and customer service once operational. For example, [the 2010 renovation of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans](#) generated thousands of construction jobs and supported local businesses during events, contributing an estimated \$285 million annually to the local economy post-renovation.

**Increasing Tourism Revenue** - Facilities that host tournaments or sports events attract visitors, which boosts local tourism. Hotels, restaurants, and shops benefit from out-of-town visitors, who contribute to the economy by staying in local accommodations and dining out. In Australia, [the construction of the Sydney Olympic Park](#) not only generated income during the 2000 Olympics but has continued to support a steady stream of visitors, providing ongoing economic benefits long after the initial investment.

**Supporting Small Businesses and Local Vendors** - Local sports facilities act as [anchors for small businesses in the vicinity](#). In Green Bay, Wisconsin, the Lambeau Field stadium, home to the Packers, stimulates year-round business for nearby hotels, restaurants, and retail stores, bringing in roughly \$15 million per game day to the local economy. Clubs should consider supporting local business by partnering with and promoting local businesses through sponsorships, collaborative events, and by sourcing club materials and services locally.

**Increased property Values** - Proximity to well-maintained sports facilities [can increase residential property values](#). Studies have shown that homes near sports facilities, particularly those that contribute to neighbourhood quality of life, often see higher appreciation rates.

Here are a few examples from the UK of how investment in sports facilities have benefited economically:

**Football Foundation Projects Across the UK** - The Football Foundation, funded by the Premier League, The FA, and the UK Government, has invested significantly in grassroots football facilities. Since 2000, it has allocated over £1.6 billion to develop pitches, clubhouses, and training facilities. These investments help create thousands of jobs in construction, coaching, and facility management, while also generating local spending from attendees and visitors to sports facilities. Projects in towns like [Sunderland](#) show direct



economic benefits by attracting local sponsorships and supporting hospitality businesses on match days.

**Sport England's Community Asset Fund** - Sport England's Community Asset Fund is a government initiative aimed at improving local sports infrastructure. With over £15 million invested in small community sports projects in recent years, the fund supports the renovation and development of existing sports facilities. For instance, the investment in the [Moss Side Community Centre in Manchester](#) helped modernize the facilities and increased community engagement in sports. According to a Sport England report, facilities supported by the fund lead to a measurable increase in sports participation, which is linked to a stronger local economy as residents spend more on sports-related goods and services.

**Birmingham's 2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy** - The Commonwealth Games held in Birmingham in 2022 [left a legacy of improved sports infrastructure, particularly at the grassroots level](#). The government invested £38 million to upgrade facilities in and around Birmingham, with an emphasis on long-term community benefit. Local surveys show that these investments have encouraged increased use of sports facilities, not only drawing local users but also attracting visitors, generating a positive economic impact. Local councils have since reported that nearby businesses, especially in the hospitality and retail sectors, have seen an uptick in revenue related to increased facility usage.

**Scottish Football Partnership Trust** - In Scotland, [the Scottish Football Partnership Trust supports grassroots projects across the country](#), with recent investments of over £2 million in community clubs. This funding helps develop sports infrastructure like 3G pitches, which are usable year-round and support local youth and adult teams. Clubs in regions like Dundee and Inverness report that these improved facilities not only boost sports participation but also attract sponsorships, local business partnerships, and increased spending on match days at local cafes and shops, providing an estimated £1 million in economic benefits annually.

## Social Return on Investment

One aspect TNIFF asked ICS to focus on was literature available relating to the social return on investment in sports and sports facilities. During the research it became apparent that public bodies and leading organisations that have invested in sporting facilities have recently adopted a Social Return on investment (SROI) model to measure this.

## The SROI model

The potential social benefits of sports participation include health care savings from improved mental and physical health, increases in skills and productivity from improved standards in education, reduced criminal justice costs from lower crime and anti-social behaviour, and increased social inclusion. In 2015, the [UK Government strategy for sport in England](#), clearly repositioned sport and physical activity first and foremost as a force for social good. It identified how sport and physical activity could have a meaningful and measurable impact on people's lives in relation to five outcomes: physical well-being, mental well-being, individual development, social and community development and economic development.

However, prior to 2012 this was an area that had proven difficult to measure. In 2012 Social value UK produced '[a guide to Social Return on investment](#)' which provided a clear framework for anyone interested in measuring, managing and accounting for social value or social impact. The SROI framework is designed to help understand, measure and value the net social impacts of an activity, organisation or intervention and is derived from some established methodologies; those being Cost–Benefit Analysis (CBA), together with

sustainability accounting and financial accounting. They have also provided [standards and guidance](#) to enable organisations and individuals to effectively measure and manage the social value they create.

SROI uses money as a common metric, which enables multiple inputs and outcomes to be included and a single monetary ratio to be created that is easy to understand.

It has enabled a marked increase in the ability to measure value derived from use of facilities and participation in sports. The main area now more measurable relates to health benefits, where it is agreed that physical activity generates benefits from both preventative and therapeutic perspective in both physical and mental health. There is also significant evidence that engagement in sport and physical activity through participation and/or volunteering can have [a positive effect on the subjective wellbeing of individuals](#). [Research suggests](#) that active people are generally [more satisfied and happier](#) than those that are physically inactive.

In the other areas of social impact, including education, crime and social capital, there is sufficient evidence, albeit of a lower quality (than health), to suggest that sport and physical activity has net positive effects.

SROI is seen as a suitable approach for a government organisation seeking to evaluate investments in sports facilities, however, they may need to [procure the expertise to conduct this](#). SROI's ability to capture the full range of social, environmental, and economic benefits aligns well with the broader public interest that government organisations are mandated to serve. Unlike CBA and Economic Impact Assessment (EIA), which might prioritize financial outcomes, SROI offers a balanced perspective that reflects the real-world impacts of sports investments on communities.

Furthermore, SROI can enhance transparency and accountability by providing a clear, quantifiable measure of the social value generated per £1 spent. This can be particularly persuasive when justifying public expenditures to taxpayers and other stakeholders, as it demonstrates a commitment to achieving the greatest possible public benefit.

ICS has identified a number of case study examples that involved an SROI approach to measuring the value of sport in general and also some examples that related solely to football. These are outlined on the following pages:

## Sport England

Sport England commissioned the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University to quantify the financial, [economic and social impact of sport and physical activity in England](#). They used the SROI framework to measure social value and to justify public investment.



Fig. 5. [Social and economic value of community sport](#)



The [findings of the report are summarised](#) as follows.

*“There are two complementary parts to the research. Part one measures the social impact (including physical and mental health) of sport and physical activity while part two measures the economic importance. Together, both parts enable Sport England to demonstrate the contribution of sport and physical activity to the five government outcomes. The research revealed that the combined social and economic value of taking part (participating and volunteering) in community sport and physical activity in England in 2017/18 was £85.5bn. When measured against the £21.85 billion costs of engagement and providing sport and physical activity opportunities, **for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity, a return on investment (ROI) of £3.91 was created for individuals and society in 2017/18.**”*

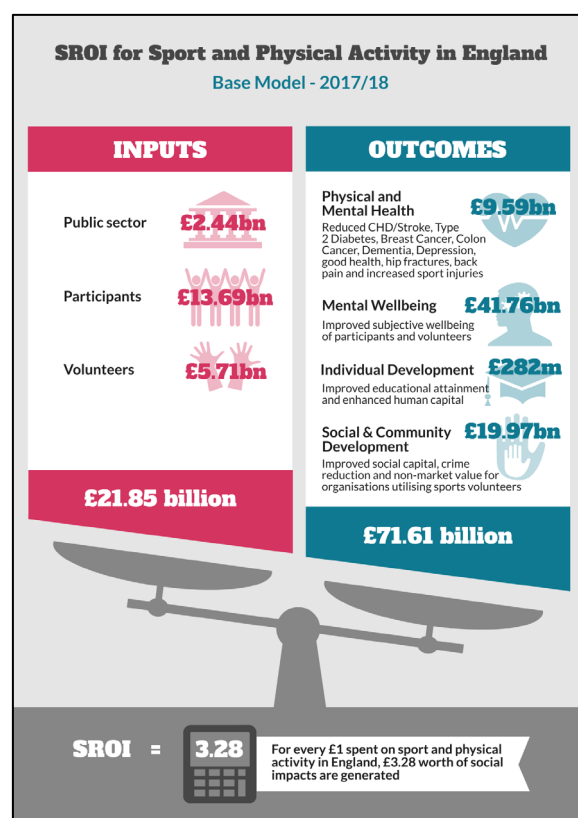


Fig. 6. SROI for sport and physical activity in England – base model 2017/2018.

## Sport New Zealand

Sport New Zealand commissioned a consortium of international researchers, jointly led by Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom) and the Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit (AERU) at Lincoln University (New Zealand) acting in partnership with Ihi Research and 4 Global, to conduct a [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\) of recreational physical activity in Aotearoa New Zealand](#).

The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“The estimated Net Present Value (that is, the difference between the value of the outcomes and inputs) is \$8.86bn, which implies a Social Return on Investment of 2.12. For every \$1 invested in recreational physical activity, \$2.12 worth of social impacts are generated.”*

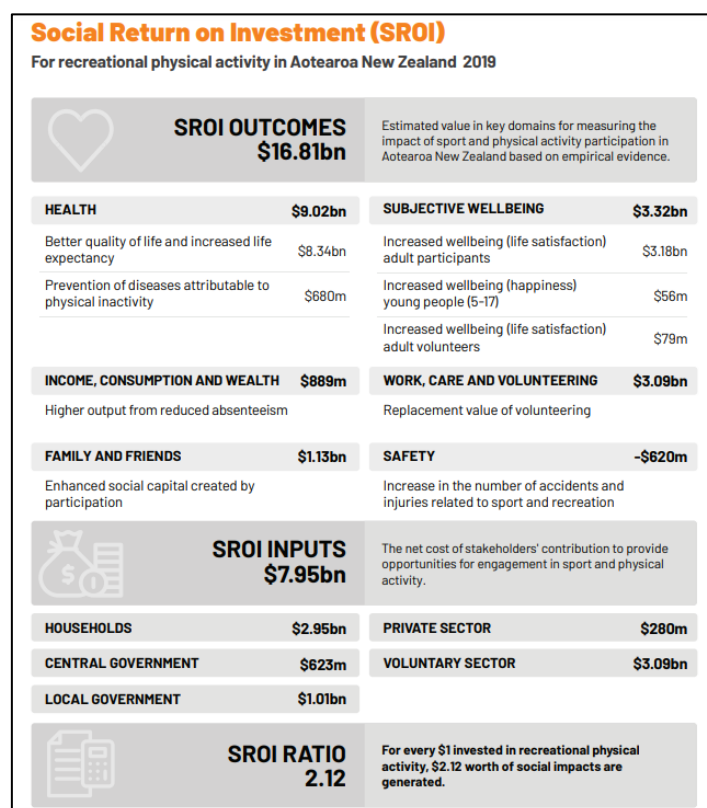


Fig. 7. SROI For recreational physical activity in Aotearoa New Zealand 2019.

## Fife Council

The work carried out for this report was undertaken between 2009 and 2011 by greenspace Scotland supported by Bums off Seats (BoS). BOS is a walking initiative delivered in Fife. It is run by Fife Council, Active Fife and Paths for All as a partnership project and currently employs two coordinating staff who manage a network of volunteers running walks in ten locations across Central, East and West Fife. The report [provided an evaluation of the social return from investing in a health walk](#) and presented the social value created by the project, from the perspective of those for whom the project made a difference. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“It was found that every £1 invested generated around £4 of benefits. By applying a sensitivity analysis, or varying any assumptions made in the calculation, the value of the benefits derived ranges from £2 to £5).”*

## Sport Wales

In February 2023, Sport Wales commissioned Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), in partnership with Loughborough University, to carry out [a Social Return on Investment \(SROI\) study of sport in Wales](#).

The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

**“The latest Social Return on Investment Study of Sport in Wales has put an updated monetary value on the benefits that sport brings to Wales as a whole. It has found that for every £1 invested in sport here, there is a £4.44 return.**

Shining a bright light on the power of sport and how it plays a crucial role in creating not just a healthy nation, but a happy, confident and connected one, the study highlights that sport contributes a staggering **£5.89bn in social value** to Wales. This comes through a range of areas including health, subjective wellbeing, social capital and volunteering.”

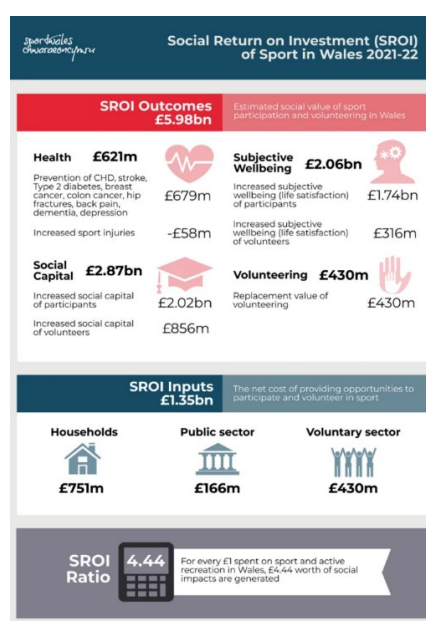


Fig. 8. SROI of sport in Wales 2021-2022.

## Walk Glasgow

The work carried out for this report was commissioned by Paths for all and undertaken from April to August 2012 by greenspace Scotland supported by Glasgow Life, North Glasgow Healthy Living Community, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Paths for All. The period that is evaluated in the analysis is 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. Walk Glasgow supports a wide range of initiatives, in addition to the led health walks, such as workplace walks, school walking initiatives and active travel. This [report details the changes that were identified and measured](#), from the perspective of those who actually experienced them as a result of participating in the led health walks. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

**“It was found that every £1 invested would generate around £8 of benefits. By applying a sensitivity analysis, or varying any assumptions made in the calculation, the value of the benefits derived ranges from £7 to £9.”**

## Girls are on the Soccer Field program, Turkey

This '[Girls are on the Soccer Field Academy SROI analysis](#)' was produced to determine the impacts that the project created, to identify the most productive and inefficient parts, and to use the resources in the most efficient way. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“After the valuation of each outcome for each stakeholder group, the result of SROI ratio is calculated as 1:12,45. In other words, **each 1 Turkish Lira (TL) invested for the Girls are on the Soccer Field Academy project, there is change in value of 12,45 TL.**”*

## North Lanarkshire Leisure

North Lanarkshire leisure (NLL) commissioned Baker Tilly to conduct an SROI evaluation of the benefits to key stakeholder groups (including but not limited to North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire) within the local area from a number of activities and sites, including: Health and wider economic benefits; The Swimming programme; The NHS referrals programme; The 'AccessNL' membership scheme; and Site-specific projects at the Shotts, Wishaw and Keir Hardie centres. The [report](#) charts how much change NLL effects, and how it does that, sharing the burden and the gain with other Third and Public Sector agencies in Scotland. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“Based on the SROI Project scope and the specific areas of NLL activities / services provided, the table below highlights that NLL generated benefits of some £41m. NLL's total revenue for 2009 was c£18 million, and is expected to be c£20 million for 2010 **On this basis, the impact of the benefits evaluated exceeds NLL's total annual funding by at least £31 million to £32 million and total revenue by £21 to 23 million.**”*

Project	Calculated benefits (£000)
Savings to NHS and wider economy (all sites)	25,582
Swimming programme	1,920
NHS programme	6,417
AccessNL	2,528
Specific projects at Keir Hardie, Shotts and Wishaw	4,568
<b>Total impact</b>	<b>41,015</b>

Fig. 9. NLL overall findings by project.

## Active Communities Network (London)

Lodestar (Private research consultancy) were commissioned to conduct [an SROI analysis on programmes of activities for young people](#) delivered by ACN, the convenor of London's Sport for Social Change Networks'. The focus was on the delivery of services to young people in the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Sutton. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“Based on the data produced by the study, Active Communities Network **returns over £4 for every £1 invested in the programmes detailed here.** The result of just over £4 is the total ratio of outcomes value to investment.”*

## A health valuation of sport and physical activity in Canada

Working with 4GLOBAL and Sheffield Hallam University, the Fitness Industry Council of Canada have utilized the best available healthcare and physical activity data and research and used it to calculate [an estimate of healthcare savings](#) generated as a result of people meeting the World Health Organization physical activity guidelines. The findings of the report can be seen in the following table.

HEALTH CONDITIONS	CASES PREVENTED	VALUE (CAN\$ MILLION)
CHD	620,162	\$8.77bn
Stroke	209,488	£7.03bn
Type 2 Diabetes	684,822	\$689m
Breast Cancer	1,786	\$201m
Colon Cancer	1,632	\$318m
Dementia	54,927	\$1.073bn
Depression	658,147	\$5.53bn
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2,230,964</b>	<b>\$23.62bn</b>
Sport Injuries	19,900	-\$175m
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,211,064</b>	<b>\$23.45bn</b>

Fig. 10. the health valuation of sport and physical activity.

## Australian Football League (AFL) Victoria

The Centre for Sport and Social Impact (CSSI) at La Trobe University produced a report entitled '[Value of a Community Football Club](#)' for AFL Victoria to determine the social value of a "typical" community football club; specifically, its social, health and community impact. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*The social return on investment for an average community football club indicates that **for every \$1 spent to run a club, there is at least \$4.40 return in social value** in terms of increased social connectedness, wellbeing, and mental health status; employment outcomes; personal development; physical health; civic pride and support of other community groups.*

## Street Soccer Academy (UK)

Regeneris Consulting carried out an SROI assessment independently and for free, through Pro Bono Economics for Street Soccer Academies (SSA). Their report entitled '[The Economic & Social Impact of Street Soccer Academy](#)' assesses SSA services which include a number of sessions and courses aimed at supporting people with multiple and complex needs through soccer and fitness. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*"This wide range of benefits to service users results in a significant pool of impacts totalling at a central estimate of £2 million in net social impacts. **This implies a social return on investment of £9 for every £1 of financial income and a social net present value of around £1.6 million for 2015.**"*

## North Yorkshire Sport

'Skyblue' (Private research consultancy) were asked by North Yorkshire Sport to carry out a Social Return on Investment (SROI) [evaluation of Sportivate within North Yorkshire](#). The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

***"In total, for every £1 invested in Sportivate in North Yorkshire between April 2011 and December 2014, there has been at least a figure of just under £3 of social value created."***

## Black Country 'BeActive' Partnership

ICF GHK was commissioned by the Black Country Consortium's (BCC) Be Active Partnership in October 2012 to undertake a Social Return on Investment (SROI) [evaluation of the 'Sportivate' Programme](#). The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

***"Taking a broad 'societal' perspective, for every £1 invested, the estimated return on investment generated by the 'Sportivate' Programme is:***

- **£5.50 over 1 year;**
- **£7.00 over 3 years;**
- **£7.50 over 5 years**

*Even after accounting for sensitivity (excludes the reduced anti-social behaviour outcome and provides a more conservative estimate of achievement rates for the other three beneficiary outcomes reducing them by 20%) the worst case scenario presented still offers a positive return on investment across the three time periods. It is therefore possible to have a high degree of confidence that the figures produced here provide an appropriately accurate assessment of the social value of 'Sportivate' in the Black Country."*

## Manchester Sport and Leisure Trust (MLST)

This study presents [an evaluation using Social Return on Investment](#) methodology of the following areas of MLST's work: Management of Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and Cardiac care through special physical activities; Neurological and Stroke Rehabilitation; Women-only facilities; Working with disabled individuals; and Physical activity for wider population from selected services.

***"The table below shows total benefits from the projects included in this evaluation to be at least £37 million per annum. These results are to be set in the context of total annual funding of £5.5 million per annum, albeit this funding covers a wider area of activity than just those projects evaluated. On this basis, the impact of the benefits evaluated for the areas of work shown above exceeds MLST's total annual funding by at least £31.6m per annum."***

	Evaluated gains
Management of COPD and Cardiac care	£ 2,751,305
Neurological and Stroke Rehabilitation	£ 1,834,476
Activities for disabled people	£ 1,755,966
Women-only activities	£ 958,284
Physical activity for wider population from selected services	£ 29,893,162
Total	£ 37,193,193

Fig. 11. MLST total benefits from the projects included in this evaluation.



## UEFA GROW SROI model

UEFA Grow's [social return on investment model](#) puts a precise figure on football's wider economic, health and social impact. It is a cost-benefit analysis that allows governments and national associations to evaluate the social benefits of Europe's most popular mass participation sport. The approach was pioneered by a UEFA programme called Grow, which offers a range of strategic development services to help Europe's 55 national associations fulfil their potential for growth, on and off the field.

Here are some SROI outcomes from UEFA's national associations, including the Irish Football Association (IFA).

### Irish Football Association (IFA)

In December 2021, using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) model developed through UEFA's GROW programme, the Irish Football Association was able to reveal that [football in Northern Ireland](#) has social, economic and health benefits that add up to £470 million per year. The UEFA GROW SROI Model is managed and maintained by Substance, a UK-based research and development company which specialises in the assessment of the social impact of sport and other activities. Members of the Substance team are supported by an advisory panel of academic and industry experts. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*"The UEFA SROI research across Northern Ireland in 2021, supported by the Irish FA, found the country's 70,000 registered football players and 18,000 football volunteers made a £77.68m contribution to the economy and generated the equivalent of £262m in social benefits and £131m worth of savings in healthcare."*

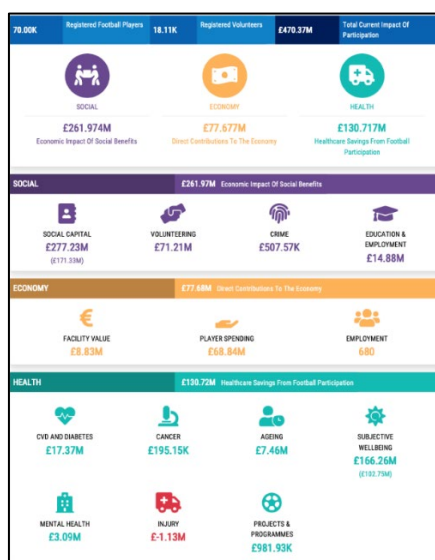


Fig. 12. Summary of findings for football in Northern Ireland.

### Spartans Community Football Academy (Scotland)

In 2020, a UEFA pilot project selected Spartans Community Football Academy to determine the tangible value of their participants and programmes to their respective communities. [The study shows](#) that they deliver millions of euros of benefit to their local areas, from savings in health care costs to volunteer programmes and investment in infrastructure. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“This latest phase of the research shows that Spartans contribute more than €6 million euros in value to the local community, including:*

- *€2.5 million euros from investment in infrastructure*
- *€1 million euros in value from volunteering*
- *€1.5 million euros value in subjective wellbeing*
- *€170,000 euros in improved mental health*
- *€100,000 euros in reducing Type I and Type II diabetes”*

## Scottish Football Association

In 2018, Scotland became one of the first countries in Europe to participate in a landmark UEFA study, with the goal of illustrating the unique benefits of football participation nationwide. From grassroots and community football clubs to national and government levels, [the report](#) aimed to provide tangible evidence of how football can serve to improve the lives of those living within Scottish society. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“The report concluded that the total number of registered players involved in the game are worth over £500m annually to Scotland and if we extend the model to include all participants, grassroots football provided over €1 billion of value to Scottish society the first time such a figure could be accurately attributed to the sport.”*

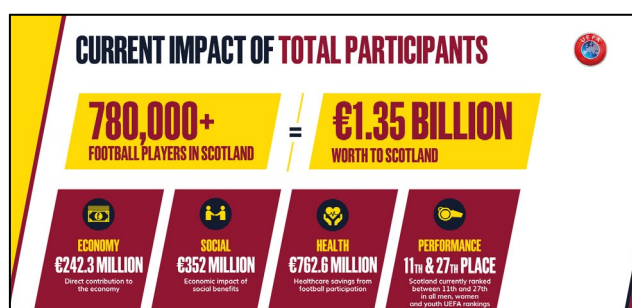


Fig. 13. Summary of findings for football in Scotland.

## Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)

The GAA calculated a SROI of €19 value generated to €1 of financial, volunteer, and in-kind investment in the Irish Life [GAA Healthy Club Programme](#).

Researchers also found some academic papers discussing alternative examples of SROI.



## Finland

In 2019, Finland became one of the countries where [UEFA SROI modelling](#) was implemented in cooperation with UEFA. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“The direct benefits of football to the Finnish economy are approximately **522 million euros** annually. In addition, the value of the social benefits is no less than **1.09 billion euros**, and the savings in health care are approximately **344 million euros**.”*

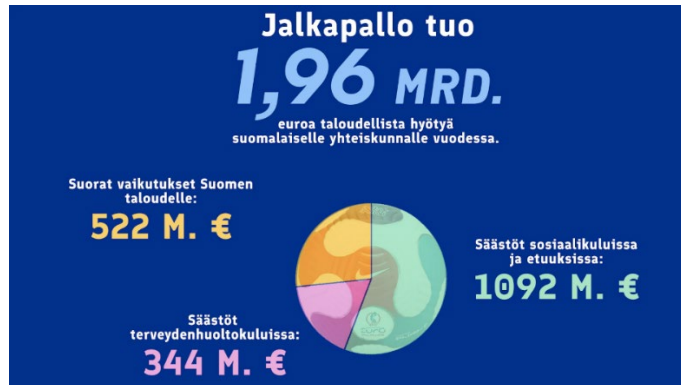


Fig 14. Summary of findings for football in Finland

## Italian FA (FIGC)

Football is a fundamental asset for Italy as a whole, on sport, economic and social level. In order to represent the growing value created by this sport, FIGC has [launched a research study](#), in collaboration with UEFA, aimed at creating a business case of scientific value. The “Social Return On Investment (SROI) Model”, has made it possible to represent the benefits derived from football participation and the consequent impact produced on the Country, with the aim of further encouraging more long-term investments and facilitating strategic partnerships aimed at the growth of Italian football. The findings of the report are summarised as follows.

*“Specifically, the study has analysed the relevant socio-economic impact of Italian football, which in 2017-2018 reached around € 3.01 billion. The sectors involved are the economic one (€ 742.1 million in direct contribution to the national economy), social (€ 1,051.4 million in savings deriving from the benefits of football participation) and health (€ 1,215.5 million in terms of healthcare savings), together with the sport performance.”*

## Football Association of Ireland

In November 2021, using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) model developed through UEFA's GROW programme, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) was able to reveal [that football in Ireland](#) has social, economic and health benefits that add up to €1.8 billion per year. The UEFA GROW SROI Model is managed and maintained by Substance, a UK-based research and development company which specialises in the assessment of the social impact of sport and other activities. Members of the Substance team are supported by an advisory panel of academic and industry experts. The findings of the report are summarised as follows:

- The current annual minimum impact of participation total of €1.8billion features €304million from the economic impact of social benefits, €355million in direct contributions to the Irish economy by those engaged in football activity and €1.14billion in healthcare savings and benefits from football participation.
- In terms of social benefits, volunteering accounts for €202million with education and employment returning €92million.
- Direct contributions to the Irish economy include player spending of €218million and a facility investment and use value of €136million.
- Healthcare savings arising from football participation amount to €1.14billion including €862million from improved subjective wellbeing, €261million from reduced incidence of CVD and diabetes, €13million from reduced incidence of mental health conditions, €2million from reduced cases of cancer and €896k from health-related projects and programmes

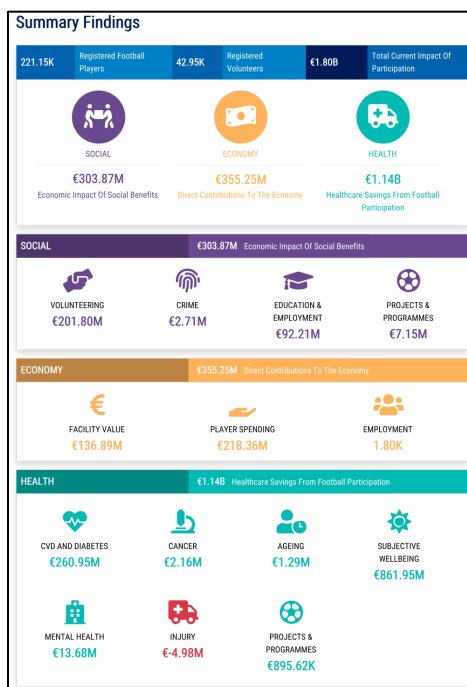


Fig. 15. Summary of findings for football in Ireland.

## Australian Sports Commission

The Australian Sports Commission partnered with KPMG and La Trobe University to investigate the value of community sport infrastructure to Australia, including the value of economic, social and health benefits associated with such facilities. While the economic, social and health benefits of sport and physical activity more generally are well-documented, the study represented an unprecedented shift in focus by exploring the value delivered and supported by the community sport infrastructure itself.

Page 27 [of the report](#) explains in detail the development of the methodology that was used to derive the value of community sport infrastructure to Australia, including clear reference that the approach deviated from the existing literature that evaluates sport through a SROI lens. The approach represented a combination of the following:

An **Economic Impact Assessment** of the direct and indirect economic activity generated or supported by the construction, operation or maintenance of community sport infrastructure.

Quantification of the **Health impact** of community sport infrastructure and associated activities using a disability adjusted life years methodology common with health economics, similar to that used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to calculate the burden of diseases on society; and

Quantification of the **social impact** of community sport infrastructure and associated activities using methods common with SROI.

The following diagram provides a summary of the methodological approach taken.



Fig. 16. methodological approach taken.

The report was published by KPMG in 2018 and they acknowledged that there was not enough evidence or data to quantify disbenefits such as the incidence of sports injuries and the potential for community infrastructure to facilitate anti-social behaviour, such as consuming alcohol or eating unhealthy food. With this mind, the findings of the report concluded that;

*“community sport infrastructure was estimated to generate an annual value of more than \$16.2 billion to Australia, with \$6.3 billion worth of **economic benefit**, \$4.9 billion worth of **health benefit** and £5.1 billion worth of **social benefit**.”*

## Using a sport to improve the use of urban space to enable community growth, economic and health benefits

This is a summary of a paper entitled [‘How is table tennis used to boost the development of Shanghai? Interviewing the executive director of Shanghai Table Tennis Association’](#) (STTA):

Scholars have examined the relationship between sports and urban development and proposed to use sport programs and events as a catalyst to:

- revitalize communities;
- upgrade urban infrastructure;
- promote city image;
- shift economic structure;
- nurture an active lifestyle; and
- enhance societal harmony and solidarity.

The goal of STTA was to integrate and to sustain table tennis into the personal, social, and economic life of the residents in Shanghai. As previous researchers acknowledged the significant influence of team sports such as soccer, basketball, baseball and American football on community development.

What did STTA do to establish hallmark or at least sustainable table tennis tournaments as a branding strategy and how did they do it? They:

- Gradually and steadily established a large number of table tennis events, which have exerted great influences on the sport of table tennis and most importantly, on the residents and visitors of the city.
- Brought table tennis out of its traditional indoor settings and encouraged fans to enjoy the sport in a simpler and more convenient and practical way. E.g. The sand table tennis competition requires players, barefooted, to play table tennis on a specially made iron table wearing swimsuits.
- The “Table Tennis Carnival” is a special event for international guests residing in Shanghai, such as foreign consulate’s staff, employees of foreign enterprises, and students attending local universities. to strengthen friendship, cooperation, unity, and development, the carnival event is featured by table tennis games, cultural exhibitions, friendly competitions, and entertainment performance for all participants.
- Cultivating sociopsychological benefits such as friendship, sportsmanship, and team work.
- Run an over 55 tournament which is a platform for older citizens to work out their bodies and make friends with people of similar ages, background and interests.

## Enhanced Revenue Streams

Clubs that allow community use of their facilities can increase their revenue by 20-30% through facility rentals, events, and increased membership dues. For example, In the article [‘5 Tips To Increase the Profitability of Your Sports Facility.’](#) there are a number of helpful tips that clubs can consider and adapt to increase their profitability.

## Activities to help clubs become more sustainable.

Eventbrite published an article in relation to [how sports clubs can make the most of their facilities](#) which contained some thoughts on growing your reach, growing revenue and becoming a hub for the community. This contained helpful examples of activities you may consider running in your facilities.

Once you get started running events at your club, you may be surprised by the added interest it brings. Other event organisers in your area might be interested in using your facilities and paying for that privilege, as well as attracting new members for the club itself. People that attend events using your facilities will naturally take an interest in the other activities you run, and by seeing a strong and vibrant community growing in your club, will also be encouraged to get involved. Whether your club is in the middle of a city, or in an isolated rural area, opening up your facilities for other uses can really benefit the wider community.

Clubhouses around the country are already playing host to mother-and-baby classes, seniors fitness sessions, and youth groups, with much more besides. Partnering with local authorities or voluntary and community groups can provide a way to run these events at no cost for participants while still generating a new revenue stream for your club, but more importantly these community-based events will generate much more in goodwill from the people you cater for, and could also encourage new members to join and get involved.

## Fundraising ideas

Buddle have a section on their website entitled '[maximising the use of your facilities](#)' whilst the Rugby League have also produced a document containing a number of [fundraising ideas](#).

Listed on the following pages are a number of initiatives that have been found that other sports clubs across the globe have used:

- **Small Business Support:** Offer opportunities for local vendors and businesses to operate concessions and sell merchandise during matches and events.
- **Community Events:** Host community events such as fairs, fundraisers, and youth camps that utilise club facilities for recreational purposes.
- **Skill Building:** Offer skill-building workshops, coaching clinics, and referee training programs that contribute to personal development and employability.
- **Digital Learning Hub:** Partner with local schools to create a STEM learning lab at your stadium, offering students access to technology and educational programs. Clubs could also offer local residents access to computers, internet, and tech workshops. BT has connected 70 grassroots football clubs across the UK [with broadband \(Wi-Fi\) and digital skills training](#), as clubs and their communities looked to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. The work is part of BT's role as lead partner with each of the four home nation football associations. **Horsforth St Margaret's FC** in Leeds is part of BT's "Connected Clubs" initiative. The club has set up community hubs that offer digital skills training, homework clubs, and job search help for locals, turning the football club into a vital community centre.
- **Startup Incubator:** Support local entrepreneurs by offering space for startup incubators, fostering innovation and business growth.
- **Children's Birthday Parties:** Make facilities available for hire for events such as children's birthday parties, anniversaries, christenings etc.

- **Culinary Workshops:** Clubs offer culinary workshops, teaching healthy cooking techniques and promoting local cuisine.
- **Gaming Tournaments:** Esports enthusiasts gather for gaming tournaments hosted by clubs, fostering friendly competition and digital literacy.
- **Arts and Performance:** Support local artists and performers by hosting art exhibitions, music concerts, and theatrical performances.
- **Community Theatre Productions:** Residents participate in community theatre productions staged at club venues, showcasing local talent.
- **Urban Farming:** Clubs can allocate space for urban farming initiatives, allowing residents to grow vegetables and herbs collectively.
- **Community Cafes:** Operate cafes or refreshment stands, serving as social hubs for residents to gather and relax.
- **Cultural Festivals:** Clubs may host cultural festivals, fairs, and markets, providing a venue for local artisans and businesses to showcase their products.
- **Outdoor Movie Nights:** The LA Galaxy hosted "Galaxy Movie Night," inviting fans to watch soccer-themed movies on the stadium's big screens, creating a family-friendly entertainment experience.
- **Future tech and virtual reality systems:** Build facilities that contain Future tech and virtual reality systems that can be used to train players in the club and can also be hired privately by the community.
- **Holiday Programs:** During school holidays, run programs for children, including sports camps, arts and crafts workshops, and educational activities
- **Environmental Art Installations:** Artists create environmental art installations on club grounds, raising awareness about sustainability issues.
- **Fitness Classes:** Make facilities available for hire for events such as yoga, Pilates, and boot camps, allowing community members to stay active.
- **Mindfulness Retreats:** Organise mindfulness retreats and meditation sessions, promoting mental well-being and stress relief.
- **Bingo:** The popularity of bingo has to be seen to be believed – every week, halls up and down the country are packed with bingo fans. and it's one of the easiest events you'll ever organise.
- **Karaoke night:** If you've got a substantial sports hall, then you are just a [karaoke hire](#) away from running what guarantees to be a fun night. This is a failsafe event that will always attract a crowd.
- **Quiz night:** What club doesn't have a few members who enjoy working a room as the quizmaster and de facto centre of attention for the night? Add a local twist by including a round on your club's history or highlights from the last twelve months.
- **Fundraisers:** From a club fundraiser to helping out a local good cause, [fundraisers will always get the support of a community](#) – as long as they know it's [happening](#).
- **Seminars or classes:** One way of growing your membership is expanding memberships to include more than just playing members. [Running talks](#) on anything from local history to sustainability will always draw a crowd, and you will be surprised by the experts in different fields around your community.
- **Open evenings:** Why not expand a traditional open evening to include community groups, charities, even people who plan their own events, to showcase the facilities you can offer them.
- **Parent and baby groups:** This can be anything from pre-natal classes to informal get-togethers for parents of young children in the area – and maybe you can get the next generation of members in earlier than usual.



## Booking and hiring

Some sports clubs allow the community to access some of their stadium facilities through room hire functions on their website. Here is an example from AFC Wimbledon where they [list the rooms available](#) for hire and the capacity they hold. The booking is made via an online form. AFC Wimbledon have an arrangement with '[Venulior](#)', an event management company, who advertise and manage booking for their facilities.

In 2019 Falkirk FC built a community pitch beside their ground. The pitch has been a wonderful and much needed asset to their players and coaches and the Falkirk Foundation Girls and Women's programme is based there. The pitch is also [hired by](#) a variety of other local clubs.

A report from 'Westport' entitled '[Making sports facilities easier to access](#)' talks about the benefits of using technology to enable booking of facilities.

The IFA has an [official pitch booking partner](#) who provides software to manage sports facilities and events, from online booking and payment to marketing, operations and analytics.

'Bookteq' have produced a 'state of football facility hire' report that can be downloaded [from their website](#). This report can help clubs to keep a finger on the pulse of booking trends and make informed decisions. Understanding when and how your pitches are in demand can optimise resource allocation and revenue generation. In the report, they delve into [pitch booking](#) trends based on the data from 85,000 bookings made at [schools](#), [councils](#), and [sports clubs](#) over the last year – providing insights that illuminate what can expect for the remainder of 2024 and onwards in relation to:

- Daily, weekly, & monthly booking trends;
- Pitch pricing averages for 5, 7, 11-a-side pitches;
- Revenue and utilisation rates of top performing operators;
- Insights into facility profitability + return on investment; and
- Booking attribution and management methods.

Here are some of the key takeaways from that report.

Synthetic pitches are roughly 2.5 times higher in price across all formats. This suggests that facility bookers are willing to pay extra for the benefits of synthetic pitches, such as consistent playing conditions regardless of the weather.

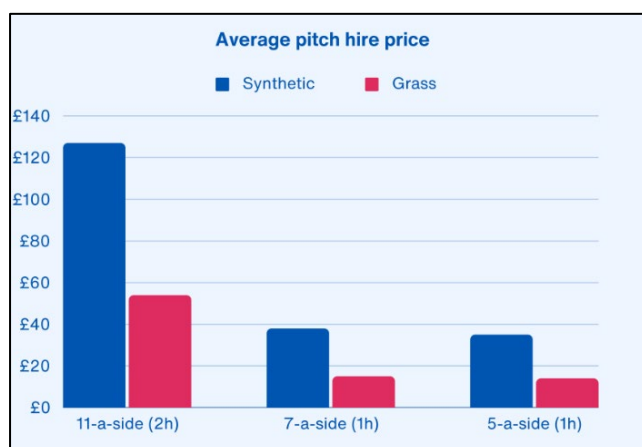
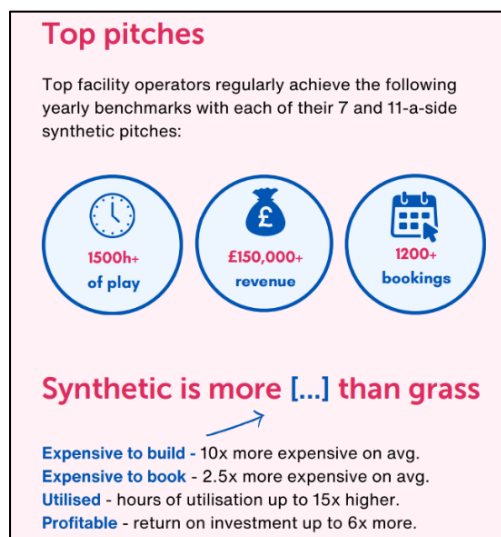


Fig. 17. Benchmarks for pitch type.

Fig. 18. Average price of pitch hire.

Unlike 11-a-side, weekdays are the most popular for 7-a-side bookings, with 87% of bookings taking place from Monday to Friday. Unlike 7-a-side, weekday bookings for 5-a-side are more equally spread, with no single day clearly standing out - utilisation gradually picks up from Monday until Thursday, and only dips again on Friday.



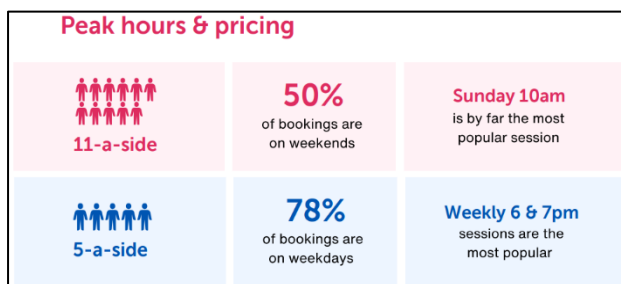


Fig. 19. Peak hours and pricing

## Benefits of 5 a side pitches for training and youth development

This short [Video](#) from Idaho rush in the USA explains the benefits to the club of building small 5 a side facilities.

## MLS initiatives

[MLS all-star week](#) includes many differing [community activities](#) and has a positive impact from an economic perspective, such as creating jobs and support for local businesses. here is a [video](#) that explains the impact.

## 4. Best Practice

The final deliverable outcome referred to in the Sub-Regional Programme strategic outline business case is that *the programme will drive high standards including for climate action and the effective delivery of capital programmes and sporting infrastructure.*

The research in this section focuses on a number of themes including corporate social responsibility, environmental sustainability, the use of new technologies, communication approaches, co-designing and building new facilities, global and regional trends and tips around traffic management and parking difficulties.

In addition, this section includes tips and toolkits that clubs may find useful across a wide variety of topics that are linked to the day to day running of a club.

### Corporate Social responsibility

[Corporate social responsibility](#) (CSR) is the idea that a business has a responsibility to the society that exists around it, in football this can be seen as a broad concept that involves football clubs taking proactive steps to contribute to social, environmental, and economic well-being. Smaller clubs often engage in various activities to deliver corporate social responsibility to their local communities.

CSR [activities can include](#):

- Community programs: Football clubs can run programs that support local youth, promote education, and foster social inclusion. For example, the Manchester United Foundation works with schools and community groups to deliver [educational programs for young people](#).
- Environmental programs: Football clubs can implement programs that contribute to environmental sustainability. For example, Club Deportivo Leganés has a [recycling initiative at its stadium](#), and [Real Zaragoza has a carbon footprint reduction project](#).
- Athlete volunteerism: Football clubs can encourage athlete volunteerism.
- Philanthropic donations: Football clubs can make philanthropic or charitable donations.

CSR is important for football clubs because it can help them attract audiences, gain a positive image, enhance value, and contribute to the sustainable development of society. This [video](#) touches on these points.

Cork City, from the League of Ireland have recently appointed a [Football & Social Responsibility Officer](#). The role will involve working with groups who may not have easy access to football including those with a disability, schools in disadvantaged areas and pensioners.

## Sustainability

[Sporting Kansas City](#) have dedicated a webpage to their Sporting Sustainability mission, which is to improve the matchday experience of fans by providing sustainable options for composting and recycling. With the opportunity for fans to act sustainably at the stadium, they believe they can enhance the matchday experience for all fans while building a healthier environment for Kansas City.

[Football for life](#) (FTB4L) is leading the way in promoting sustainability, responsible business practices, diversity, equity, and environmental, social, and governance initiatives within the global game. They have lots of useful blog articles explaining what they do.

17-Sport have written a blog about [re-thinking urban life through the lens of sport](#) which provides some examples of countries and clubs introducing initiatives to help achieve net-zero.

## Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Practices

Some examples under this heading include:

The US Major League Soccer have produced guidance relating to [sustainability and eco-friendly practices](#). They focus on areas such as energy, water and waste, eco-friendly stadium design and construction, transportation, merchandising and using new technologies. Solar panels have become a common sight at MLS stadiums, dramatically reducing dependence on fossil fuels. These installations do more than just power the stadiums; they often generate surplus energy, which is fed back into the local grid, contributing to the community's overall renewable energy supply. MLS clubs are exploring other forms of renewable energy, such as wind and geothermal power, to further lessen their environmental impact. They have a 'Greener Goals' initiative that highlights its drive to address its environmental impacts and provides [a number of helpful tips](#) for clubs to consider.

- In Australia, the redevelopment of Melbourne Park began in 2010. The design placed a strong emphasis on the comfort of patrons and users and used clever initiatives to reduce its environmental impact. More details about the sustainability initiatives they used can be read on their [website](#).
- The World Economic forum published an article about Forest Green Rovers football clubs sustainable ethos and the fact they are [using recycled coffee beans](#) to make the kit they play in.
- Ajax in Amsterdam claim to have one of the most [innovative sustainable stadiums](#) in the world. Their webpage talks about the innovations in energy and waste management they adopted.
- Life tackle, is an international project co-funded by EU LIFE programme, aimed at improving the environmental management of football matches and the overall level of awareness and attention towards environmental issues in the football sector. They have produced [a database of good practice](#) which focuses on environmental and sustainability topics as well as operational management of football events. The wide range of guidance available can be helpful to clubs trying to find ways of working around these topics.

- The international Olympic Committee have produced [a number of useful guides](#) around the issue of sustainability such as '[plastic game plan for sport](#)'. These guides explain the issues sustainability is trying to address and provides guidance for organisations to adopt more sustainable practices.

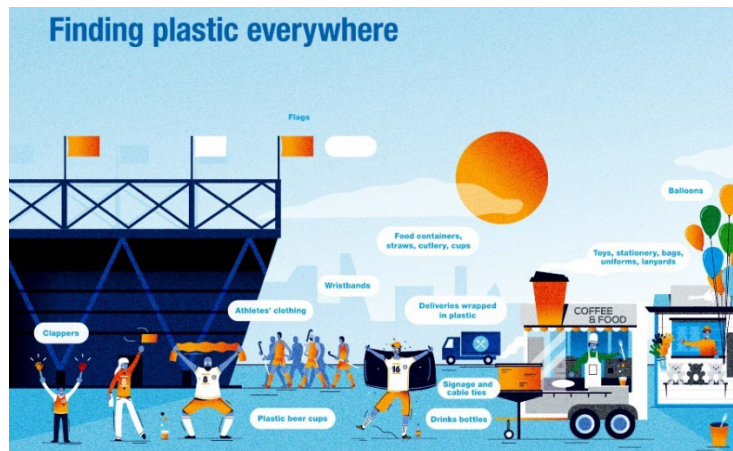


Fig. 20. IOC finding plastics poster.

- The proposed [redevelopment of Plough Lane stadium](#) in Wimbledon undertook around 2 years of consultation with the public with the outcome resulting in the following 3 key aims;
  1. Enhancing the cultural heritage of South West London through AFC Wimbledon returning to their historic home;
  2. Sustainable regeneration of the site with a mixed-use community; and
  3. Substantial community benefits.

They see their facilities as a community asset and this report highlights a number of activities they currently run in the community:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>SPORTS PARTICIPATION</b> - Holiday Football Courses, Football League Kids Club, Football League Girls Cup, After School Clubs, Saturday Football Club,</li> <li>▪ <b>EDUCATION</b> - Stadium School Mathematics Project, Flying The Flag, School Literacy Support, School Poetry Competition, 'What's Your Goal?', 'RESPECT',</li> <li>▪ <b>SOCIAL INCLUSION</b> - Street League Academy, Football Fans Against Homophobia, Raising Stars Development Programme, The AFC Wimbledon Experience, The Big Blast Band, Comic Relief, Sport Relief, The Big Challenge, One Game, One Community</li> <li>▪ <b>HEALTH</b> - Walking Football, Blood Pressure Awareness, Prostate Cancer</li> <li>▪ <b>COMMUNITY EVENTS</b> - Merton Abbey Mills Kidsfest, Winter Wonderland, Wimbledon Village Fair, Mitchum Carnival, Scout Movement Badge Work, Paint A Womble Day, The Wonderful Wall Of Wombles</li> <li>▪ <b>AFC WIMBLEDON EVENTS</b> - Matchday Birthday Parties, Matchday Inflatable Shoot-Out</li> <li>▪ <b>FUNDRAISING</b> - Charity Mascot Races, Bucket Collections, Minithon</li> <li>▪ In 2012, AFC Wimbledon received the Prime Minister's Big Society Award for its great community work.</li> </ul>
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Fig. 21. List of activities run at Plough Lane.

Some of the proposed facilities they are planning to build after public consultation are shown in the following picture.

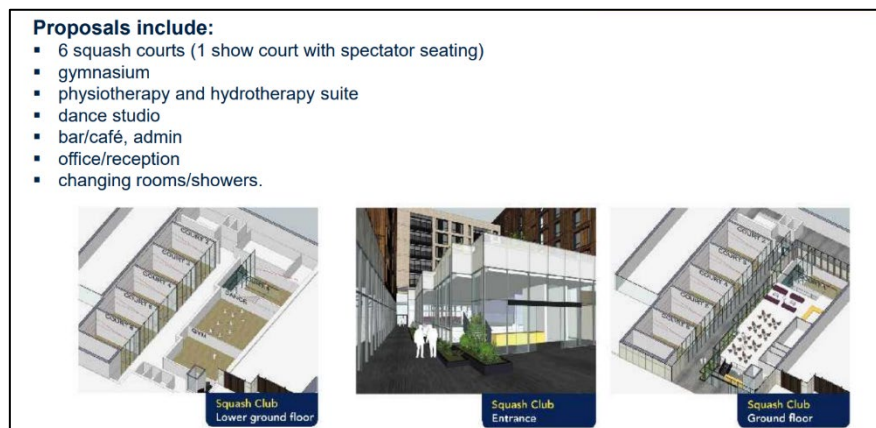


Fig. 22. Future plans for Plough Lane.

UEFA's 2021 [sustainability strategy](#) contains many policies and strategies that 'Football' is planning to implement by 2030. It contains explanations of what each policy means and lists existing initiatives that UEFA has in place to help meet their targets.

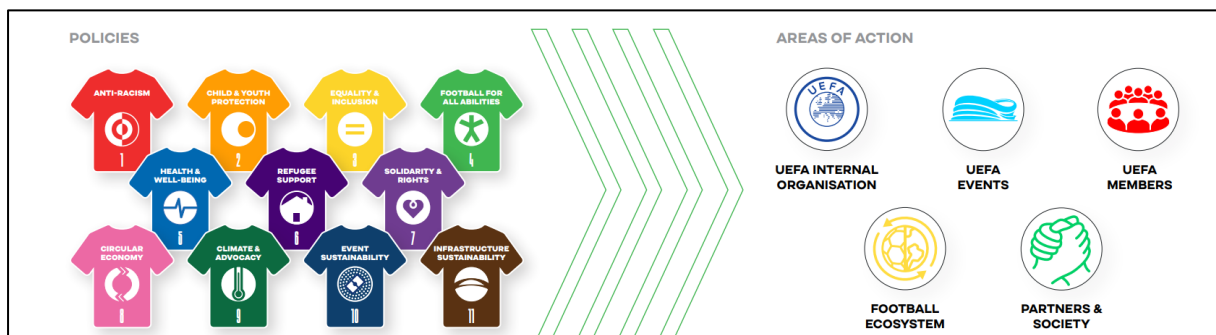


Fig. 23. UEFA sustainability strategy infographic.

## Sustainable pitches

An article on [the problems with 3G pitches](#) was published in January 2024. It provides insight on the concerns of using 3G pitches and also discusses alternatives that could be considered by clubs, like hybrid playing surfaces such as that installed at [Anfield](#).

'Fidra', a Scottish environmental group, uses scientific evidence and research best practice to achieve positive environmental change. One aspect they have focused on is microplastics on sports pitches, and the environmental impact of them. They have produced guidance for pitch owners which can be downloaded from their [website](#).

## NIFL working group

NIFL have established a [Sustainability Working Group](#) to consider how clubs can collectively work together and tackle the issue on how to serve their local communities.

## Renewables

Sport England has developed a number of helpful guidance documents and these can be found on their [‘How to reduce energy costs’](#) webpage.

Sport NI has also launched a [‘Renewable energy fund’](#) to help local clubs reduce energy costs.

The Football Foundation has drafted some [‘energy support guidance’](#) for clubs to help them become more energy efficient.

## Green football weekend

Forest Green Rovers have developed a resource pack for clubs who would like to host a [‘Green Football weekend’](#). The toolkit contains ideas for activities to run and example communications that can be issued.

Manchester City explored the use of edible coffee cups in 2021 as part of their goal to [eliminate all single use plastic](#). Here is a [video](#) from a café in Australia that introduces edible coffee cups with a little more detail on what the product is made from.

## Harnessing New Technologies

### Major League soccer (MLS)

Innovation in green technology is at the [forefront of MLS’s sustainability efforts](#). The league and its clubs are exploring cutting-edge solutions to further reduce their environmental impact. This includes the adoption of smart stadium technologies that optimise energy and water usage, automatically adjusting to real-time needs and conditions.

Additionally, clubs are experimenting with new materials and technologies for pitch maintenance that are more environmentally friendly and efficient.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are being employed to analyse and optimise various aspects of stadium operations, from energy consumption to waste management. This not only leads to more sustainable practices but also helps in reducing operational costs.

MLS clubs are forming strategic partnerships with environmental organisations and green technology companies too. These collaborations aim to leverage external expertise and resources in pursuing ambitious sustainability goals. Partnerships with renewable energy providers, for instance, are enabling clubs to transition more rapidly to clean energy sources.

Telefonica in Spain, published an article relating to [the use of new technologies to create ‘Smart’ stadiums](#). It discusses how innovative technologies such as 5G connectivity, the Cloud, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence, and the Internet of Things offer football clubs everything they need to improve and extend their relationship with their fans, to attract new audiences and to increase the number of spectators in their stadiums.



## Examples of new innovative facilities to support clubs to train and produce talent

At [skills.lab](#) they combine a data-driven and analytical approach to sports with their love for football. They support athletes in their development by helping them become better football players. They have a number of innovative [training products](#).



Fig. 24. Skills.Lab smart ball management system

Precision Football is a new facility for football training and recreational play in Dubai. The space is home to a number of smart pitches, [a cutting-edge Tech Centre](#) with seven different zones, and a world class academy with professional coaches on hand to take your skills to the next level. The link to the Tech Centre gives a perspective of what the future holds for football facilities.

The [football Gym](#) is a hi-tech football inspired gym who are for everyone, whether people want to train hard or simply play for the fun of the game. They have built facilities that offer the opportunity to recoup income through hiring them out. Although focused on costly and state of the art facilities, reading the options on this website may help inspire ideas around how clubs can think about their facilities from a [business perspective](#).

[Norwich City](#) has invested in the [SoccerBot 360](#) at a cost of £750,000, the system helps players improve their scanning, first touch and passing skills using a 360° projector screen and a number of computer programmes. It also has the ability for players to relive in-game situations and work on their decision making and passing skills from previous matches.

## Transforming urban spaces case studies

[New York City Soccer Initiative](#): This partnership between the City of New York, New York City FC, and various organisations aims to build 50 mini-soccer pitches in underserved neighbourhoods. These pitches provide safe play spaces, encourage physical activity, and serve as community hubs. This [document](#) provides insights into the value it delivered and how thinking outside the box helped to turn previously underused space into modern and usable football facilities.

The [big shed Nottingham](#) is something different as it is a space for hospitality and so much more. You can expect a diverse range of events throughout the year including live music, comedy, street food, films and markets. DJ's and musicians can even synchronise visuals to the screen, so they could even host an old-school *Street Fighter* tournament on a Playstation, with life-sized characters!. They have also just been granted permission [to expand](#) the facility. Here is a [Video](#) containing more detail.



## Innovative Soccer spaces

Subsoccer is a table football game where two players sit on either side of a table and use their feet to kick a small ball into the opponent's goal, the game is demonstrated in this [video](#).



Fig. 25. Subsoccer tables in London for the final of Euro 24.

Indoor soccer training area, [this article](#) explains how a family in the US transformed a part of their home during the pandemic into an indoor tech enabled soccer training area.



Fig. 26 - Tech enabled indoor soccer training facility.

Urban Soccer Park in the US are a mini soccer pitch building company that helps people to build small scale soccer courts for space constrained areas. They have [a number of case studies](#) on their website that may provide ideas for those interested in seeing what is possible. Here is a video showing [the building of one of their pitches in New York](#).

Comprehensive Objective Performance Assessment (COPA) is based in the US and their goal is to become the global standard for both player identification and assessment-oriented youth development in the sport of soccer. They have many [innovative facilities](#) which are highlighted on their website.

[Jorkyball](#) is a format of two vs two football. It is played in a 10 m (33 ft) by 5 m (16 ft) cage on artificial turf with the possibility of using the walls to pass, dribble, and score. As in football it is played only with the feet and use of hands is forbidden. The objective is to score goals into a net. As in squash and paddle, the sport is played in a four-walled court and all of them can be used including the net above.



*Fig. 27. The compact size and shape of a Jorkyball court make it suitable for facilities with limited space.*

## Using social media

Sports clubs using social media – The Cruyff institute wrote an article entitled '[Social networks empower clubs and sports organizations to the detriment of the traditional press](#)' which includes a helpful list of best practices and practices to avoid, for clubs wishing to utilise social media networks.

Buddle have a great webpage providing advice to clubs about [marketing and communications](#), they also have a number of useful tips regarding the [use of social media](#), including choosing the right channels, reaching the right people and keeping it safe.

Read the story of [Hashtag united](#) and how they grew massively through use of social media and tapped into this growth to grow revenue.

Sportspro media have published an article talking about using your players social media to [grow your fanbase](#)

Global Sustainably Sport published an article talking about '[How can sport use social media to drive sustainability?](#)'

## Useful sites to follow on Social media

[MLS Works – on X](#) - The social responsibility platform of the Major Soccer league in America shares stories from across the MLS around club initiatives aimed to help the community.

## Some website resources for clubs

[Buddle](#) - provides free learning and support resources to inspire and strengthen clubs and community organisations offering sport and physical activity. Here is a helpful [video](#) explaining what they offer and how they can help.

[Xero website](#) has a list of resources that can help you manage your club. For example, '[How to get sponsors as a grassroots football club](#)'.

The [Footballco podcast](#) provides insights into the business side of football and has interviews with a wide range of business and football experts from across the globe.

The [European Football for Development Network \(EFDN\)](#) consists of professional football clubs, leagues and FAs who are committed to their communities and social responsibilities and have the passion to cooperate and engage on a European level. The network aims to promote the power of football as a tool for social development and support the efforts of the network members in their initiatives to use football to reach out to various target groups in their communities. They have an excellent [resources](#) section on their website that covers a range of topics, however to access resources you will have to apply to [become a member](#).

[Junior grassroots soccer NI](#) - are an independent voice with a mission of supporting the junior grassroots football community in the UK. They promote the work of the IFA and have a section that contains links to a number of very [useful documents](#). They also have advice around [funding and fundraising](#) and tips like ensuring your club is registered with HMRC as a community amateur sports club.

The football supporter association has produced numerous [helpful guides](#) on a variety of topics related to running football clubs. One specific examples, written by Supporters Direct, relates to '[How clubs can win with football supporters](#)'. The purpose of this guidance is to:

- Identify the different ways supporters engage with clubs (and vice versa);
- Highlight good and bad practice and provide cases studies to show examples; and
- Provide practical and effective templates and tools to help both supporters and clubs implement best practice.

Sport England have developed some '[cost of living financial tips](#)' for clubs to help them tackle financial challenges.

[Falkirk Football Community Foundation](#) have a number of articles and initiatives outlined on their website that has seen them win the prestigious 'Football For All' award in Scotland. They have also developed a strategy, called [community champions](#), with a vision to be a leading provider of sport, health, education, and employability activities to children, young people, and adults in our community. They outline how they will strive to achieve their vision in the following diagram.

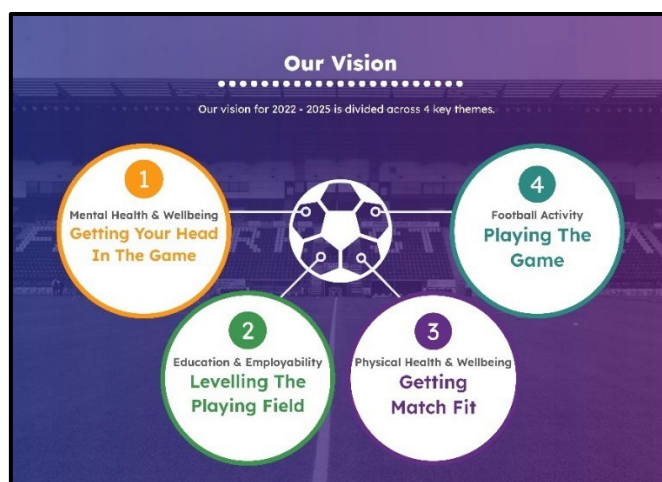


Fig. 28. Falkirk football community foundation strategic vision infographic.

[Dulwich hamlet](#) Supporter's trust has set up a website that contains a lot of information for members and how it works to support the football club and the community.

## Resources relating to community and facility building projects

The Football supporters association provides advice and guidance on how clubs can plan for and implement [community projects](#) and some case studies for successful projects e.g [Merthyr Town Heritage day project](#).

Supporters Direct commissioned research to help inform their ongoing role in football stadia developments and to outline [the different ways in which community benefit can be enshrined, delivered and protected through stadia](#). The research is based on 5 case studies covering performance to grassroots clubs. The research explored ways in which:

- The ownership structure of stadia can be organised to protect community and supporter interests.
- Community benefit can be delivered through stadia.
- Community benefit can be protected.

The report also provides guidance (P.39) on how clubs could measure community benefit they provide.

Supporters Direct have produced a helpful guide in relation to '[Facility development and financing](#)' which contains guidance on developing facilities, accessing funding streams and links to other useful resources.

Funding application insights have been provided in relation to surrey county council's '[Your Fund Surrey](#)' programme. This includes examples of how bids meet the criteria outlined by the Council, which may be useful to consider when making an application for funding.

Buddle have produced some useful tips and advice for clubs consider changes to or [development of new facilities](#).

The football foundation has a grant scheme to enable clubs and grassroots organisation to apply for grants to develop/redevelop small sided artificial playing facilities. Their website provides guidance [documentation](#) to help clubs understand the requirements and make applications, some of this may be useful to consider when making any application for funding. e.g. the [Community engagement toolkit](#).

Telefonica Tech in Spain published an article [focusing on how clubs in the Spanish first and second Divisions could spend grant money on developing their facilities](#), although the money involved is greater per club the content of the article may provide clubs with some helpful insights.

'Sportsvenue' technology published an article on their website entitles '[11 ways technology is shaping the football field](#)'. The article discusses various topics relating to revenue raising, the use of data, fan engagement and injury prevention.

An article published on 'Broadcastnow' highlights [the immersive content coming to football stadiums](#). This includes a focus on augmented reality and virtual reality initiatives that are just around the corner.

'Fcbusiness' have published an article about '[emerging technologies in football stadium security](#)'. This article looks at the ways English Football League clubs are harnessing new technology to help them people safe within their stadiums.



A newsletter issued by Walker Morris on 2023/24 season: [The latest uses of technology in football](#) highlights a number of uses and initiatives although these may be in their infancy.

## Co-designing new facilities with communities

[US squash](#) created a country club setting for Philadelphia school kids, while finding a lively use for a dowdy historic building, The Specter Center. It also offers free access to the neighbourhood's low-income residents and affordably priced memberships for everyone else. Its linked to the local university with the students, and their families, getting free memberships and squash lessons.

[Runcorn Rowing Club](#) are planning to build new facilities and have identified the need to focus not just on the sporting need but also the community need in their plans. "There would be a first-floor club social area, a meeting room and storage area, a bar area and kitchen, car parking and a new water treatment plant." Runcorn Rowing Club said it was keen for the boathouse to become a resource available to local community groups, something that was not feasible with its existing inadequate facilities.

[Kicks for life](#) in South Africa have developed [facilities](#) that cater for both the football club and the community. The club was set up as a charity and a social enterprise, with a mission is to change the lives and long-term prospects of vulnerable young people in Lesotho, through a [wide range of social development activities](#) focused on health, education and support towards sustainable livelihoods.

Sport England's webpages relating to facilities and planning offer many useful resources and guidance. Their [design and cost](#) pages provide advice on topics such as cost, accessibility and clubhouse design. They also have a [sustainable facilities](#) and planning page that offers practical support on how you can embrace sustainability to drive down running costs. The diagram below indicates a possible framework for developing a robust strategy for any facility.

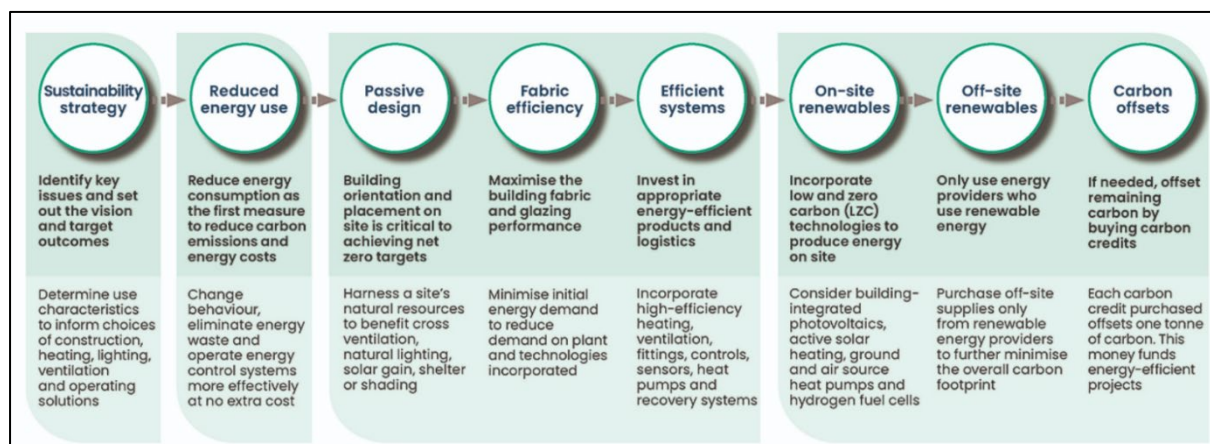


Fig. 29. Sport England sustainable facility framework.

Sport NI also has guidance for the [design of facilities](#).

## New facilities community consultation case studies

The Ageas bowl, home of Hampshire County Cricket, was planning a major redevelopment of its facilities and surrounding grounds. As part of this process they undertook a [community consultation](#) to share their plans in order to identify areas of support and inform the progression of the development.

The city of Vancouver have a website focused on the development of a [new community recreation centre](#) in the city. This website includes very helpful project related documentation and touches on aspects of community consultation (Skate Park) and how to run them.

## Best practice for running an infrastructure project

After reviewing a number of articles and case studies, clubs planning for and running infrastructure projects may wish to consider the following;

- Proactively looking to partner with local groups and organisations (Schools, charities, etc) who can help advise on topics such as accessibility, sustainability, youth perspectives, health needs,
- Form a community advisory panel, invite community reps onto the project board or introduce some other form of community representation on governance bodies.
- Engage local artists and cultural groups to ensure the design reflected the community's identity and values.
- Launch the new facilities with a community event.
- Develop a communication strategy that should include the following to provide updates on progress and allow the community to provide thoughts:
  - a website;
  - A social media outlet;
  - A newsletter;
- Host open day events (community BBQ etc) at the facility where community members could tour the proposed site and provide feedback on design mock-ups.
- Use [virtual reality simulations](#) (provided by architects) to give community members a preview of proposed designs and gather their reactions.

## Volunteering

A Sport England horizon scan outlined [the trends that will impact sport and physical activity to 2031](#) and beyond. This document may be of interest to policymakers and those considering strategic decisions around how you might grow your clubs. It provides insights into how changing trends may impact the ecosystem in which you are operating.

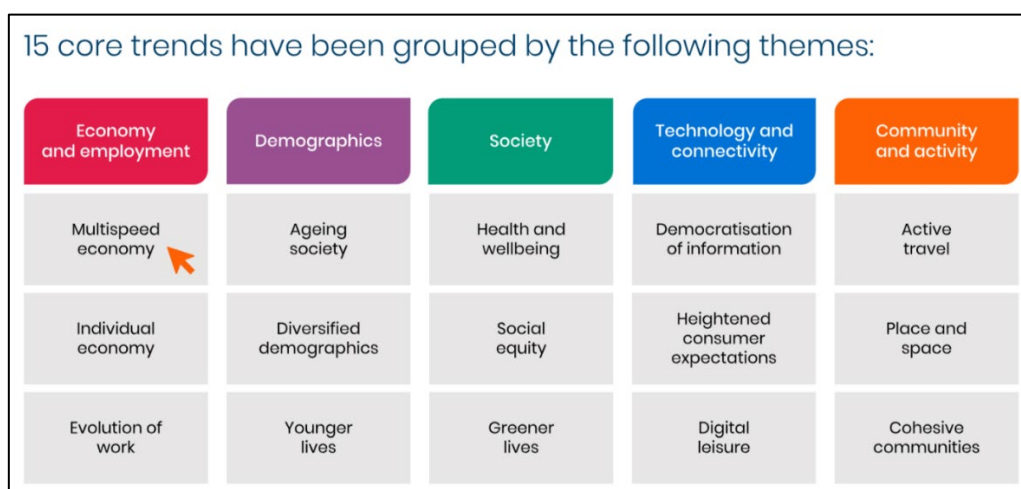


Fig. 30. Trends that will impact sport and physical activity to 2031 and beyond.

## Northern Ireland specific material

Spotted [community pulse survey report](#) highlighted a number of key findings that may be helpful to understand the ecosystems clubs are working within. Those findings are;

- Concern about the impact of **cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high**, with 83% of respondents either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group.
- A large majority of groups said their group has made a change in response to cost-of-living increases; 79% have subsidised equipment and/or kit for their young people and **60% have reduced membership fees**.
- Groups **are expecting future cost pressures**.
- More than half of group leaders report that **young people have seen a reduction in disposable income** meaning they are less able to afford subs, travel costs, clothing or kit.
- 48% of group leaders have reported that their young people **have experienced reduced mental wellbeing as a result of cost-of-living increases**.
- Group leaders report **the best ways to get young people active** include offering affordable activities, creating inclusive environments (for young people of all backgrounds and abilities), delivering fun non-competitive sessions with lots of encouragement, and a variety of different activities.
- **Over half want school facilities more available and more affordable**.

Groups **have varying relationships with other organisations within the ecosystem**.

Over three quarters are connected to their National Governing Body for sport. Nearly half of groups don't work with their Sports Council and two-thirds have no connection to leisure trusts.



## Parking and traffic congestion

Parking and traffic congestion is a problem that has been experienced by sports clubs across the globe. To tackle these problems the following initiatives have been employed:

- Clubs have adopted **smart parking systems** that provide real-time data on available parking spaces, reducing the time drivers spend circling the area. For example, [Colchester United](#) have introduced a car monitoring system at their stadium and [Bolton Wanderers](#) have partnered with a company to manage their parking. By partnering with local councils, clubs can implement apps or signage that direct attendees to the nearest open spots. This initiative has proven effective in managing congestion around busy sports venues and reducing unnecessary traffic.
- **Shared Community Parking Spaces** – Some sports clubs in urban areas have partnered with nearby schools or businesses to share parking lots during weekends and evenings when they are unused. An example of this is where [Dungannon Swifts](#) have collaborated with the PSNI and the local primary school to open the school parking during match day. This reduces the strain on local streets and improves relations with the community.
- **Park-and-Ride Schemes** – A few clubs have successfully implemented park-and-ride services from nearby public transport hubs, [Leeds United](#) are an example of this. By encouraging members and attendees to park farther away and shuttle to the venue, these initiatives help reduce congestion in local neighbourhoods.
- **Off-Peak Discounts** – By working with local councils and private companies, some clubs have arranged discounted or free parking in nearby public and private car parks during off-peak hours, when residential parking needs are lower. [Watford FC](#) have an example of this.
- **Carpooling Campaigns** – The Football League in England have [teamed up](#) with carpooling organisation liftshare.com to help fans reach home and away fixtures for their teams. Carpooling schemes reduce the number of vehicles requiring parking.
- **Dedicated Drop-off Zones** – To minimize parking needs, some clubs created designated drop-off zones that allow parents to drop their children at the venue and return later for pick-up, avoiding long-term parking. [Liverpool FC](#) have dedicated drop-off and pick-up points and pre-booked accessible parking.
- **Bicycle-Friendly Initiatives** – [Premier League clubs](#) have added secure bike racks and launched campaigns encouraging attendees to bike to games, significantly reducing the number of cars parked in surrounding areas.
- **Temporary Grassland Parking** – In rural areas, clubs have negotiated temporary use of adjacent grasslands (e.g. farmers' fields etc) for parking during peak events, ensuring minimal impact on nearby residents.
- **Public Transit Partnerships** – Some clubs located near public transport lines have partnered with local transit authorities to offer discounted or free travel for attendees on match days, encouraging the use of public transport. The Football League [partnered](#) with the Association of Train Operating Companies to help fans save time and money.
- **Community-Led Parking Management**: Some grassroots clubs have created volunteer-led parking management schemes, where local residents help guide and manage parking to prevent overflow into residential streets. The article '[Community driven parking solutions: Engaging local residents in UK car park management](#)' by William Parker provides examples of how working with residents and local authorities may help resolve tensions around the issue.

## Examples of innovative Parking solutions

*Rethinking the Future*, a platform that encourages excellence in architecture have written an article about [innovative and sustainable parking solutions in overcrowded cities](#). Although this article talks about solutions in cities it may prompt some ideas that could be considered and thought about on a smaller scale at some of the local clubs.

## Traffic management

How fans and employees of clubs travel to and from the stadium has an impact on sustainability and this [article from 'The Sustainability Report'](#) outlines initiatives that clubs across the globe are trying to introduce to reduce the carbon footprint of their club. This would also have a positive impact on traffic congestion and parking issues that arise in the local communities.

It can be very beneficial both for your own fans and those visiting your clubs to clearly communicate your parking arrangements. A good example of how this can be achieved is [Oxford United](#), who advise what parking is available both at the ground and in the surrounding area and highlight the risk of receiving a ticket for parking illegally.

## Sport for development and peace

The Commonwealth Secretariat advocates for the use of sport as a vehicle for development and peacebuilding. Their work focuses on how sport can be used to contribute to national development objectives and the UN Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda – a global agenda and blueprint that aims to end poverty, protect the planet and make sure all people enjoy peace and prosperity. They run a number of programs to help countries maximise the benefits of sport and many of these are detailed in their '[From the Field: Sport for Development and Peace in Action](#)' report. They have case studies of numerous programs detailing how the programs were designed and delivered and the impact they delivered. The programs are listed in 5 themes which are;

- Child and youth development;
- Health and prevention of disease;
- Gender equality;
- Inclusion of people with disabilities; and
- Social integration and peace-building.

## Research on youth behaviours and barriers

'StreetGames', a sport for development charity wanted to better understand the different types of young person who might benefit from their support and commissioned Platypus Research to undertake a [formal segmentation study](#) on their behalf. This study provides insight into the behaviours of young people and the barriers they face when trying to engage in sports. They break the respondents down into [7 segments or persona's](#), giving explanations of the make up behaviours and motivations of each one.

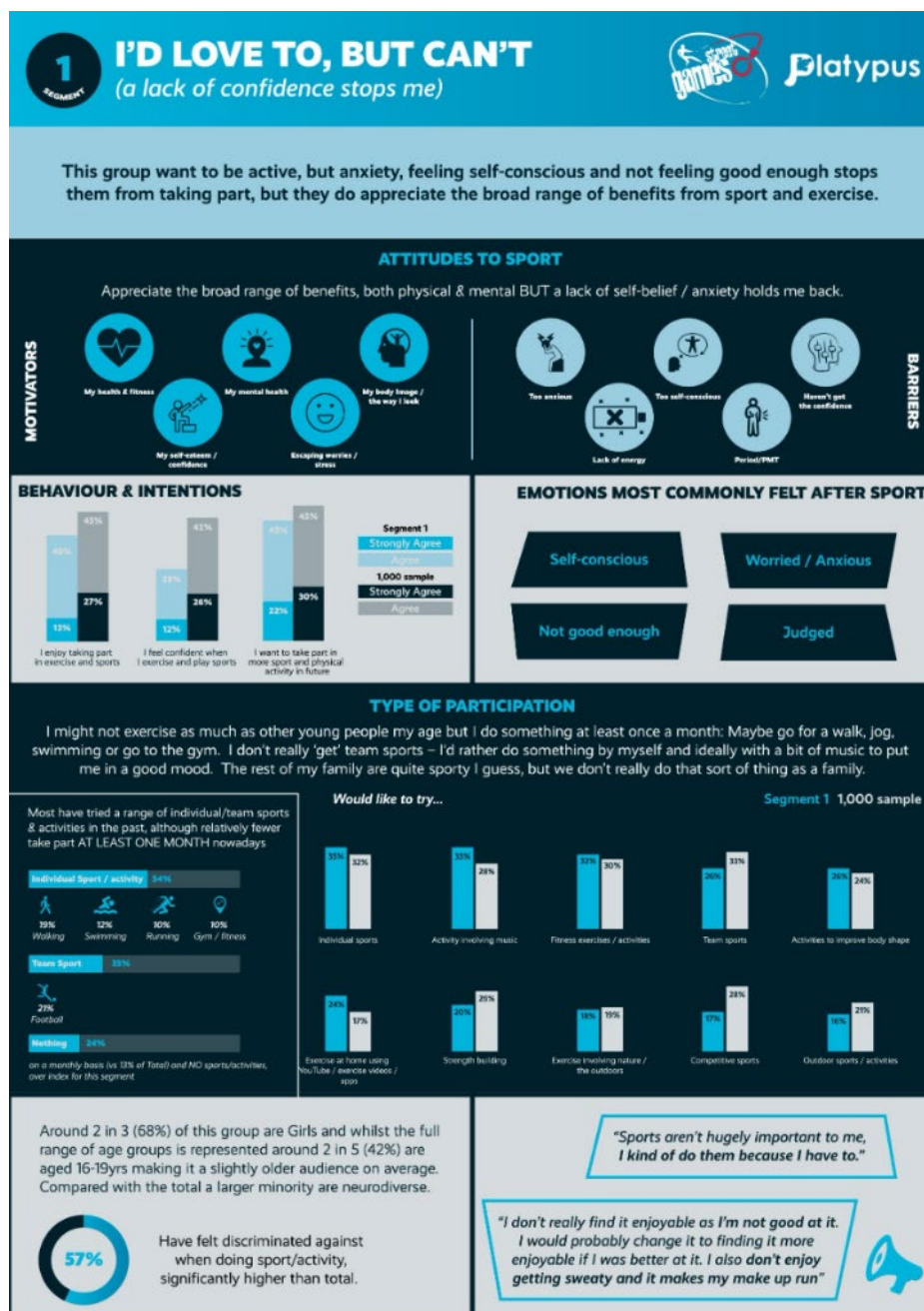


Fig. 31. Persona infographic for 'I'd love to, but can't'.

They have also provided example of [Activity Offers](#) that may be attractive to each of the personas - this may be helpful in trying to reach out to the youths to encourage them to come and experience activities your club offer.

# In summation

This research was conducted by ICS researchers sourcing material from academic literature, case studies, video archives, websites or published articles and blogs. The content of this report is intended to support The Department for Communities, Football authorities and performance and grassroots clubs to modernise footballing facilities at every level in communities across Northern Ireland. The table in **Appendix i** has been created as an easy reference tool to useful toolkits and guidance that is contained within the body of the report.



*This research was completed 29<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and at that point all links included within the report were live. ICS note that these links may be lost if source websites update their pages.*

# Appendix i – Toolkits and guides

This table contains various toolkits that have been sourced during this research.

Source	Benefit	Link
<b>Health</b>		
World Health Organisation	To help clubs to become health promoting hubs	<a href="#">Health Promoting Sports Clubs</a>
<b>Engagement and communication</b>		
Football foundation	To help clubs engage with their community	<a href="#">Community engagement toolkit</a>
Buddle	Guidance to help clubs choose the right channels, reach the right people and keep it safe.	<a href="#">Using social media</a>
Buddle	How to publicise your group and get results, using effective communications and marketing strategy.	<a href="#">Marketing and communications</a>
England Football	To help clubs engage with the youth and encourage them to volunteer	<a href="#">FA youth leadership and volunteering toolkit</a>
<b>Environmental sustainability</b>		
Life tackle	Guidance to help clubs improve the environmental management of football matches.	<a href="#">Database of good practices.</a>
International Olympic Committee	These guidelines will provide valuable information in an easy-to-follow manner to help clubs navigate the complexities of 'sustainability' and develop effective programmes.	<a href="#">Sustainability essentials.</a>
FIDRA	Best practice guidelines to help clubs keep microplastic in mind at every stage of choosing, designing, maintaining and using a pitch.	<a href="#">Cleaner pitch guidelines.</a>
Sport England	This guidance aims to give practical support on how energy efficiency measures can reduce running costs for organisations involved with small physical activity and sports facilities.	<a href="#">Reducing energy costs guidance.</a>
Football Foundation	Practical hints and tips from the Football Foundation on how your club or organisation can deal with rising energy costs by becoming more energy efficient.	<a href="#">Energy saving hints &amp; tips</a>
Sport England	Practical support on how you can embrace sustainability to drive down running costs, along with	<a href="#">Sustainable facilities and planning</a>

	advice on dealing with droughts and flood guidance.	
<b>Financial</b>		
Xero	Guidance to help clubs improve their business admin and become more financially sustainable.	<a href="#">Football small business guides.</a>
England Football	Some top tips to help navigate your way through the current pressures on the cost of living.	<a href="#">Cost of living financial tips</a>
Sport England	The guidance is to help give clubs a greater understanding of overall design concepts, an appreciation of the technical issues involved, and the critical factors that you need to consider to find the right solution for your facilities project. It has links to a number of bespoke facility types.	<a href="#">Design and cost guidance</a>
Supporter Direct	A guide detailing how to develop and finance new facilities.	<a href="#">Facility Development Financing.</a>
Buddle	How to maximise the use of your facilities	<a href="#">Maximising the use of your facilities</a>
<b>Accessible facilities</b>		
Sport England	A set of principles that can be used to ensure your facilities are designed in an inclusive and accessible manner	<a href="#">Inclusive design principles</a>
Sport NI	Best practice sports design guidance, split by facility type (for information only).	<a href="#">Design guidance for sports facilities.</a>
<b>Social responsibility</b>		
Social Value UK	Enables clubs to effectively measure and manage the social value they create.	<a href="#">Social value standards and principles</a>
Football Supporters Association	Useful guidance to support clubs planning for and implementing community projects.	<a href="#">How to plan a community project.</a>