



IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR FOOTBALL CLUBS

March 2025

How to Realise Your Facility Development Plans

Here's a step-by-step breakdown to help your club successfully plan and develop its facilities¹

Step 1: Look at the Bigger Picture

- **Define Your Vision:** What do you want your club and facilities to look like in 5–10 years? Think about how these improvements will benefit your players, supporters and community.
 - **Assess Needs:** Identify the gaps in your current facilities and prioritise improvements.
 - **Set Goals:** Align your facility development plans with your club's long-term strategy and community needs.
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Step 2: Develop a Strong Business Case

- **Plan Ahead:** Explain why the project is necessary and how it will be sustainable.
 - **Consider Finances:** Outline expected project costs and identify match funding sources.
 - **Show Impact:** Highlight how the project will benefit the club and the wider community (e.g., increasing participation, improving physical & mental health, revenue generation).
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Step 3: Strengthen Your Club's Foundations

- **Grow Club Structures:** Use the Irish FA's 'People & Clubs' accreditation programme for guidance) and support for:
 - Improving governance and leadership.
 - Enhancing player pathways and coaching structures.
 - Developing policies and plans that support your club's growth and future sustainability.
 - Developing opportunities for women and girls to play the game.
 - Link to Irish FA website www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/community-volunteering/people-clubs-accreditation or email club.development@irishfa.com.
 - **Create a Facility Development Sub-Committee:** Assemble a team within your club's committee to oversee and drive the project.
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Step 4: Create Facility Development Plans

- **Develop a 'shovel ready' project -** Evidencing that the club has the legal right to use the site or property (copy lease/management agreement or title deeds if the club owns the

land/property) and all necessary statutory approvals are in place (full planning permission is granted for the project).

- Take advantage of Sport NI's free advocacy service including advice and guidance relating to the design and procurement of sports related facilities – contact Sport NI's Capital Team to discuss your project plans - Tel: 028 9038 3894.
 - Engage Professionals who have experience in developing sports facilities: Work with architects and quantity surveyors (QS) to create:
 - Technical drawings and specification documents.
 - Detailed project costings.
 - Follow Best Practices: Ensure plans developed by the appointed design experts comply with safety and regulatory standards, including the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) 6th edition Green Guide.
 - Review Irish FA ground criteria requirement documents - www.irishfa.com/media/41546/ifa-joint-ground-criteria-nov-2019.pdf - and regional league competition regulations, to ensure compliance with footballing standards.
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Step 5: Engage Stakeholders

- Identify Key Stakeholders:
 - Players and supporters.
 - Your local authority, local elected representatives and the local planning office.
 - Target community groups.
 - Other sporting groups.
 - Funders and sponsors.
 - Involve Them Early: Share your vision and get their input. Build relationships with key decision-makers.
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Step 6: Secure Funding

- Explore Match Funding Options as capital grants may not be an 100% award:
 - Club fundraising activities.
 - Irish FA facility development grants.
 - Department for Communities/ Sport NI capital funding.
 - Local Authority grants.
 - Short-term & long-term loans – bank loans, Community Finance Ireland communityfinanceireland.com

- Use online resources such as the NI Sports Forum and NICVA to source funding - www.nisf.net, supportingcommunities.org/funding, www.nicva.org/services/fundraising.
 - Create a Compelling Case: Use your business plan to show funders the value and long-term viability of your project.
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Step 7: Manage the Project

- Set a Timeline: Break the project into phases with clear milestones.
 - Monitor Progress: Regularly review timelines, budget and project outputs.
 - Communicate: Keep stakeholders and club members updated throughout the project development and delivery process.
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Step 8: Deliver and Celebrate

- Ensure Compliance: Before opening, confirm all safety and regulatory standards are met.
 - Involve the Community and Stakeholders: Host a launch event to celebrate the new facilities and showcase your club's vision.
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Summary Checklist

- ✔ **Define your vision and set goals.**
- ✔ **Strengthen governance through the Irish FA's 'People & Clubs' programme.**
- ✔ **Build a strong development team and engage stakeholders.**
- ✔ **Develop a business case and secure funding.**
- ✔ **Create professional facility plans.**
- ✔ **Monitor progress and deliver the project successfully.**

ⁱ This document draws on the Irish FA's experience in football facility development, offering guidance from a football perspective. It is not a replacement for professional, technical or legal advice. Clubs are advised to consult with qualified facility development experts and professionals for support. As best practice, new facility developments should comply with the safety standards outlined in the 6th edition of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) 'Green Guide' and meet all applicable statutory, regulatory, and common law health and safety requirements. Responsibility for health and safety matters remains entirely the full and sole responsibility of the club and/or venue operator.