

ACTIVE PLACES

RESEARCH REPORT 2009

Bridging the Gap



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Northern Ireland

The lead agency for developing sport in Northern Ireland

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I am delighted to introduce Sport Northern Ireland's (SNI) Active Places Research Report, 'Bridging the Gap', 2009. This report presents the findings of SNI's facilities research, and outlines the challenges ahead in addressing the shortfall in key sports facilities in Northern Ireland.

The importance of sport and physical recreation is now well recognised and publicly acknowledged. People in Northern Ireland are passionate about sport and physical recreation, and enjoy participating, competing, spectating and volunteering. In many instances sports facilities enable the population to fulfil their enjoyment in sport, but without facilities the many benefits of sport would not be realised.

This report represents the first sports facilities research in Northern Ireland and I value the contribution that this report will have on addressing many of the issues that relate to sports facility provision.

On the strength of the evidence presented in this Active Places Research Report, I believe that this document presents a unique opportunity to set a strategic agenda for SNI's capital programmes, and to identify priorities for the distribution of our capital funding. I also believe that this document will offer the key providers of sports facilities the opportunity to strategically address facility shortfall in a manner that meets the needs of the local population.

As identified in this document, the shortfalls and deficiencies in sports facility provision in Northern Ireland are alarming, and are further emphasised when compared to levels of provision provided in other regions of the United Kingdom.

In order to 'bridge the gap' in sports facility provision, it is essential that we all adopt a strategic approach to the development of sports facilities. Facility providers, planners, operators and those funding the development of sports facilities have a responsibility to ensure that existing, proposed and new sports facilities have a maximum impact in addressing the many issues identified in this document.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eamonn McCartan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eamonn McCartan
Chief Executive, Sport Northern Ireland

1.1

Sport and physical recreation, including the provision of quality sports facilities, can have a profound effect on peoples' lives, whether it's future athletes being inspired by world-class performances, or older people and women becoming more active. It also plays a role in improving health and well-being, education, and contributes to improving social cohesion.

1.2

There are a range of factors that limit participation in sport and physical recreation. Sport Matters, the Draft Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019 (Sport Matters) suggests that inadequate provision of sports facilities is one of the key barriers. In addition, Fields in Trust (FIT) (2008) cites research by the University of Oxford into participation. This noted that levels of physical activity depend, in part, on access to quality leisure provision, particularly for outdoor sports. Further research by Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) also suggests that a shortage of accessible and affordable local facilities is a greater deterrent to participation than limited free time.

1.3

Generally, sports facility development in Northern Ireland has been non-strategic and uncoordinated, and this has led to a number of issues with sports facility provision, particularly in relation to quantity, accessibility, condition and specification. In order to assess the extent of these issues, SNI had to undertake a comprehensive research exercise that assessed the adequacy of existing sports facility provision in Northern Ireland.

1.4

In advance of the research, SNI had to first undertake an audit of the current stock of sports facilities in Northern Ireland. This information was then stored on SNI's Facilities Database, which currently records data on over 5000 facilities, and is updated once every two years. The Facilities Database is available to view online at:

www.sportni.net/activeplacesni



1.5

Two methodologies were employed to analyse the information contained within the Facilities Database: The Facilities Planning Model (FPM) and FIT, Six Acre Standard. Further information on the methodologies adopted for this research is available in Chapter 4.

1.6

This document presents the findings of SNI's Active Places research and offers opportunities for facility providers to develop facilities strategies for their region or sport. SNI proposes that the information contained within this document should also be used to set a strategic agenda for SNI's capital programmes, and to identify priorities for the distribution of capital funding.

2.1

The following are some of the key issues regarding facility provision in Northern Ireland, all of which are addressed in this document:

2.1.1

Quantity: Using two methodologies, SNI has identified a significant under-provision in key sports facilities. This has been supported by pro-rata comparisons to other regions of the United Kingdom and consultations with governing bodies and facility providers.

2.1.2

Accessibility: As a result of the significant under-provision in some facility types, many user groups do not have access to some sports facilities at appropriate times. This has resulted in limited development opportunities for large numbers of sports and their governing bodies.

2.1.3

Universal Access: Generally, sports facilities in Northern Ireland have been built to the standards required by building regulations. However, in reality, these facilities are unable to accommodate the needs of many sports people with disabilities, particularly in relation to team sports.

2.1.4

Specification: Many sports facilities in Northern Ireland do not comply with the minimum governing body standards for sport at club or representative level. There are issues with size, dimensions, surface type, lighting etc.

2.1.5

Condition: Research suggests that many sports facilities built and managed by District Councils in Northern Ireland were built prior to 1990 and that many more are over 25 years old. This has resulted in a large number of publicly accessible sports facilities in need of significant refurbishment.

2.2

Section One of this document presents research findings from SNI's comprehensive benchmarking analysis. Using a number of recognised methodologies, including the FPM and FIT Six Acre Standard, SNI has assessed the current stock of key sporting facilities and has assessed the facility needs of Northern Ireland with reference to quantity, accessibility, universal access, specification, and condition.

2.3

The analysis has identified unmet demand and shortfalls for facilities such as sports halls, swimming pools, tennis courts, athletics facilities and pitches (grass and synthetic). The findings are categorised by each of the 26 District Councils and the 11 Local Government Districts proposed under the Review of Public Administration (RPA). The research findings also offer a prioritisation of need, by calculating the facility shortfall per head of population.

2.4

Section Two of this document presents an analysis of other key facility types, such as: high performance facilities; spectator facilities; performance development centres; countryside facilities; multi-sport facilities; and motorsport facilities.

2.5

Based on the views of the governing bodies and facility providers, Section Two identifies some of the issues with existing facility provision, and in some cases offers recommendations based on the requirements of the governing bodies.

2.6

This document presents the findings of the first Sports Facilities Research in Northern Ireland, and therefore should be used in the most appropriate manner to address the many issues in sports facility provision. The Review of Public Administration has presented some interesting challenges for all involved, but never before has there been such opportunity to plan for new and refurbished sports facilities in a way that strategically guides for the maximum impact on the sports facility deficit in Northern Ireland.

3.1

The purpose of this Active Places Research Report is to provide an evidence base that will inform the strategic development of sports facilities in Northern Ireland. It has been developed to offer guidance to the key providers of sports facilities in Northern Ireland. It also presents excellent opportunities for facility providers to strategically address key issues and unmet facility demands identified in their existing and proposed geographical area.

3.2

This document will be of benefit to all those involved in providing, planning, operating and funding sports facilities. However, it will also be of interest to those interested in promoting and developing sport at all levels in Northern Ireland, such as:

- staff and committees within District Councils responsible for sports facility planning and development
- staff and committees within governing bodies for sport responsible for the development of 'club' sports facilities
- staff and committees within the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority responsible for the delivery of sports facilities within the school estate
- stakeholders within the private sector who provide sports facilities, or with an interest in providing sports facilities
- staff and volunteers within the community and voluntary sectors with a sporting remit
- staff and committees across all Government departments who are responsible for recommending strategic priorities, particularly in the context of sport and recreation.

4.1

SNI has assessed the facility provision for a number of the more popular sports, and has identified facility needs through the following methodologies:

Key Methodologies

Sport Scotland Facilities Planning Model	An assessment of the relationship between the likely demand for a number of key sports facilities and the actual supply.
Fields in Trust (FIT) Six Acre Standard	A comparison against FIT's national standard for outdoor sport, that recommends three acres of pitch space for every 1000 people.

Supporting Methodologies

Home Country Sports Councils Comparative Analysis	A pro-rata comparative analysis that compares Northern Ireland's sports facility provision to other regions of the United Kingdom.
National Standards for Sport Comparative Analysis	Comparisons against facility standards developed by governing bodies for sport.
Northern Ireland Sports Facilities Providers Supporting Information	Supporting information gathered from the providers of key sports facilities.

4.2

An initial task in this assessment was to undertake an audit of the current stock of sports facilities in Northern Ireland. The information was then stored on SNI's Facilities Database, which currently records data on over 5000 facilities, and is updated once every two years. Information was also collected on accessibility, universal access, specification and condition.

4.3

This document presents the results of the Facilities Planning Model (FPM), developed by Sport Scotland and administered by Edinburgh University. Using population and sports facilities data from Northern Ireland, this model has identified facility shortfalls for sports halls, swimming pools, tennis courts and athletic facilities. The assessment also benchmarks Northern Ireland's existing grass and synthetic pitch provision against the recommendations of FIT, and identifies shortfalls in pitches for all of the current 26 District Council areas and 11 proposed Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland.

4.4

SNI supports the findings of the two methodologies by assessing levels of facility provision in Northern Ireland compared with regions of the other Home Country Sports Councils, and where available, national governing body standards for sport eg. UK Athletics. In addition, the views of Northern Ireland's sports facility providers, governing bodies and other user groups have been included to assess if they support the findings of the FPM, the Six Acre Standard and the results of the other comparative studies.

4.5

Facilities Planning Model (FPM) – Sports Halls, Swimming Pools, Tennis Courts and Athletic Facilities

4.5.1

The FPM provides an objective assessment of the relationship between the likely demand for sports facilities in an area and the actual supply. It takes into account the distribution of the local population and its demographic structure, as well as the capacity and availability of facilities and their catchment areas.

4.5.2

Using this data, the model is able to distribute demand from the study area to available facilities on the basis of catchment areas, linking people (demand) to facilities (supply) in terms of realistic travel patterns. It then identifies 'unmet demand' – that is, demand which cannot be accommodated by existing facilities. This may be because existing facilities are operating at full capacity, or because there is demand arising from outside their catchment areas because of a lack of supply in a neighbouring area.

4.5.3

SNI commissioned Edinburgh University to analyse the information contained in the SNI Facilities Database for some of the key facility types in order to identify facility shortfalls and areas of particular need.

* FPM uses participation data and sport-specific surveys from England and Scotland to set parameters for facility demand. SNI has recently commissioned IPSOS Mori to conduct the first bespoke Sport and Physical Activity Survey that will inform future implementation of this model.

4.6

Fields in Trust (FIT), Six Acre Standard – Pitches

4.6.1

FIT established the Six Acre Standard (SAS) as a guide to ensure that sufficient land is set aside in appropriate locations to enable the population to participate in sports, outdoor play, games and other physical recreation. It sets a minimum standard for outdoor playing space of six acres for 1000 people – comprising of four acres for outdoor sport (specifically three acres for pitch sports) and two acres for children's play. The SAS also recognises the value of synthetic pitches.

4.6.2

Playing fields are of vital importance in Northern Ireland, as much of local sport and physical recreation takes place on pitches. Without the appropriate type and quality of pitch in the right location, sport and physical recreation would be significantly restricted.

4.6.3

Using the Six Acre Standard as a baseline, SNI has assessed the need for pitches based on three acres per 1000 population. The Six Acre Standard recommends the value of a synthetic pitch to be calculated as twice that of a grass pitch. However, based on a recent assessment of usage patterns, SNI recommends the value of synthetic pitches to be calculated at four times that of a grass pitch. SNI recognises that the following results of the Six Acre Standard analysis have limitations ie. it does not take into account the quality of pitches but it will provide an estimation of need and identify priorities.

Research Findings - Section One

Sports Halls

5.1

Quantity

The analysis below excludes all education facilities (as public access is limited – see section below on accessibility) and weighted church halls at 20% of potential capacity due to their suitability for sports use and their availability for non-church activities. All other facilities were included at 100% capacity.

Dimensions of sports halls are generally quoted in relation to the number of badminton courts that can be accommodated in a facility.

Total existing provision:	340 badminton courts
Total provision required:	482 badminton courts
Total shortfall of provision:	142 badminton courts

To put the identified shortfall into perspective, 142 badminton courts is equivalent to:

total shortfall of provision
142 badminton courts =

36 Four-Court Halls, or
24 Six-Court Halls, or
12 Twelve-Court Halls

5.2

Areas of particular need

The following tables show the number of unmet visits to sports halls in Northern Ireland and make recommendations for the number of courts required to address unmet demand.

Table One calculates unmet demand and facility need for the existing 26 District Councils, whilst Table Two calculates need based on the 11 proposed Local Government Districts.

Both tables prioritise facility need by District Council area by calculating the unmet visits per head of population.

Table One - 26 District Council Calculations

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Badminton Courts Required	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Moyle	17,148	533	3	3.11%
Derry	110,485	2,975	15	2.69%
Down	69,189	1,682	8	2.43%
Armagh	57,704	1,323	7	2.29%
Ballymoney	30,229	610	3	2.02%
Antrim	50,675	949	5	1.87%
Ballymena	61,039	1,109	5	1.82%
Coleraine	57,045	1,029	5	1.80%
Ards	77,862	1,400	7	1.80%
Banbridge	46,909	841	4	1.79%
Craigavon	85,946	1,475	7	1.72%
Newry and Mourne	95,325	1,579	8	1.66%
Cookstown	35,238	563	3	1.60%
Magherafelt	43,682	695	3	1.59%
Lisburn	112,450	1,726	9	1.53%
Newtownabbey	81,714	1,224	6	1.50%
Belfast	263,313	3,887	19	1.48%
Carrickfergus	40,096	561	3	1.40%
Castlereagh	66,094	899	4	1.36%
North Down	78,020	1,059	5	1.36%
Dungannon	50,995	621	3	1.22%
Fermanagh	60,739	679	3	1.12%
Strabane	40,107	446	2	1.11%
Larne	31,243	326	2	1.04%
Limavady	36,014	294	1	0.82%
Omagh	51,661	341	2	0.66%

(SFS, 2009)

Table Two - 11 Proposed Local Government Districts' Calculations

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Badminton Courts Required	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Derry City/Strabane	150,592	3,421	17	2.27%
Newry City/Down	164,514	3,261	16	1.98%
Armagh City/Bann	190,559	3,639	18	1.91%
Causeway Coast	140,436	2,466	12	1.76%
Antrim/Newtownabbey	132,389	2,173	11	1.64%
Ards/North Down	155,882	2,459	12	1.58%
Mid-Antrim District Council	132,378	1,996	10	1.51%
Belfast	263,313	3,887	19	1.48%
Lisburn City/Castlereagh	178,544	2,625	13	1.47%
Mid-Ulster District Council	129,915	1,879	9	1.45%
Fermanagh/Omagh	112,400	1,020	5	0.91%

(SFS, 2009)

5.3

The FPM suggests that the current provision of sports halls is insufficient in meeting potential demand from the Northern Ireland population. Approximately 35% of all potential weekly visits to sports halls are unmet, either as a result of the availability of existing sports halls, or because there are significant shortfalls in other key facility types.

The Facilities Planning Analysis is supported by a comparison study between Northern Ireland's sports hall provision to other regions of the United Kingdom. The following table shows the average results:

5.4

Table Three - Sports Hall Comparative Analysis

	England & Scotland	Northern Ireland
Badminton Courts	1 court per 2,600 people	1 court per 3,904 people

(SFS, 2009)

5.5

During a recent audit of all sports facilities in Northern Ireland, facility providers indicated that the current sports hall provision is insufficient in addressing demand. A recurring theme from District Council providers highlighted that sports halls are compensating for shortfalls in other facility types (mainly outdoor synthetic pitches) in order to accommodate the training needs of local sports clubs/teams. This has resulted in access issues, and in many cases it has become difficult to obtain court time for 'pay and play' use.

5.6

Accessibility

Part of the shortfall could be addressed if school sport and recreational facilities are made available for use by outside groups and sports clubs/teams. However, research findings from the SFS Background Paper (Background Paper, 2009) have shown that only 47% of schools in Northern Ireland would allow community access, and only 10% of this figure currently promotes the use of their facilities. If SNI assumes that 50% were available for 100% of out-of-school hours and actively promoted their facilities, this would still leave a shortfall of 9% (48 badminton courts) in sports hall provision. There are also accessibility constraints as a result of poor facility specifications (see Specification 5.8).

5.7

Universal Access

The SNI database shows that many sports halls, although complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), do not meet the requirements for the users of sports wheelchairs. Sports wheelchairs have a wider wheel base than wheelchairs used for everyday use. This means that many users have to transfer to and from their wheelchairs to access many facilities. It is important that design specifications address this issue for new-build and renovated facilities.

5.8

Specification

It is important that the specifications for sports facilities are in line with the facility requirements of the governing bodies for the respective sports. The SNI database identifies that many sports halls in Northern Ireland are of inappropriate size to optimise their use, and very few venues are big enough to accommodate some sports eg. netball and volleyball.

5.8.1

There is a particular problem with school sports halls, as the dimensions for these facilities are set by the Department of Education and do not equate to the recommended dimensions of the respective governing bodies.

5.8.2

Furthermore, there are numerous sports halls that have floors designed to accommodate non-sport uses such as exhibitions, and although these surfaces can be used for some sporting activities at entrant or recreational level, they are not suitable for many sports at club or high performance level. Solid floors with suitable coverings can accommodate a variety of sporting activities for recreational sport; however, timber suspension and specialised floors are the favoured surface for many sports at club or high performance level.

5.8.3

It is also important that halls are of appropriate height for the respective sports, and that lighting complies with the requirements of the respective governing bodies, particularly those halls used for club or high performance sport. The Background Paper 2009 shows that this is often not the case.

5.9

Condition

Research findings from the Background Paper (2009) indicate that 70% of all District Council sports halls were constructed prior to 1990 and 66% are over 25 years old. Although in many cases there have been significant refurbishments, many facilities (particularly the ancillary facilities) are dated and in many instances are showing signs of disrepair.

5.10

Summation of findings/recommendations

Given the shortfall in sports halls in Northern Ireland, it is important that hall use is maximised by making all facilities, particularly those in the education sector, available to as many users as possible. It is unrealistic to expect all facilities to meet specifications suitable for club or high performance sport. However, such facilities should be provided on a strategic basis to ensure that sport can be effectively delivered at all levels throughout Northern Ireland.

Research Findings - Section One

Swimming Pools

5.11

Quantity

The analysis below excludes all education and private facilities due to their general specification and restrictions on public access. All District Council facilities were included at 100% capacity.

This analysis also references the size of swimming pools against the FPM average of 25m x 10m. However, swimming pools in Northern Ireland are generally larger (25m x 12m) and this has been taken into account in this analysis.

Total existing provision:	10,646 sqm of water (approx 36 pools)
Total provision required:	12,405 sqm of water (approx 42 pools)
Total shortfall of provision:	1,759 sqm of water (approx 6 pools)

To put the identified shortfall into perspective, 1,759 square metres of water is equivalent to:

total shortfall of provision
1,759 square metres of water =

Six 25m pools, or
Three 50m pools

5.12

Areas of particular need

The following tables show the number of unmet visits to swimming pools in Northern Ireland and make recommendations for the square metres of water required to address unmet demand.

Table Four calculates unmet demand and facility need for the existing 26 District Councils, whilst Table Five calculates need based on the 11 proposed Local Government Districts.

Both tables prioritise facility need by District Council area by calculating the unmet visits per head of population.

Table Four - 26 District Council Calculations

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Square Metres of Water Required	Number of Pools	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Moyle	17,148	717	88	0.30	4.18%
Down	69,189	1,752	216	0.74	2.53%
Fermanagh	60,739	1,401	172	0.59	2.31%
Newry and Mourne	95,325	1,754	216	0.74	1.84%
Banbridge	46,909	812	100	0.34	1.73%
Strabane	40,107	685	84	0.29	1.71%
Omagh	51,661	706	87	0.30	1.37%
Ards	77,862	1,026	126	0.44	1.32%
Dungannon	50,995	670	82	0.28	1.31%
Magherafelt	43,682	536	66	0.23	1.23%
Ballymoney	30,229	338	42	0.14	1.12%
Limavady	36,014	380	47	0.16	1.05%
Antrim	50,675	527	65	0.22	1.04%
Newtownabbey	81,714	848	104	0.36	1.04%
Coleraine	57,045	537	66	0.23	0.94%
Cookstown	35,238	317	39	0.13	0.90%
Larne	31,243	278	34	0.12	0.89%
Armagh	57,704	477	59	0.20	0.83%
North Down	78,020	642	79	0.27	0.82%
Ballymena	61,039	462	57	0.20	0.76%
Derry	110,485	817	101	0.35	0.74%
Lisburn	112,450	821	101	0.35	0.73%
Belfast	263,313	1,375	169	0.58	0.52%
Castlereagh	66,094	298	37	0.13	0.45%
Carrickfergus	40,096	158	19	0.07	0.39%
Craigavon	85,946	281	35	0.12	0.33%

(SFS, 2009)

Table Five - **11 Proposed Local Government Districts' Calculations**

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Number of Pools Required	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Newry City/Down	164,514	3,506	1.49	2.13%
Fermanagh/Omagh	112,400	2,107	0.89	1.87%
Causeway Coast	140,436	1,972	0.84	1.40%
Mid-Ulster District Council	129,915	1,523	0.65	1.17%
Ards/NorthDown	155,882	1,668	0.71	1.07%
Antrim/Newtownabbey	132,389	1,374	0.58	1.04%
Derry City/Strabane	150,592	1,501	0.64	1.00%
Armagh City/Bann	190,559	1,570	0.67	0.82%
Mid-Antrim District Council	132,378	898	0.38	0.68%
Lisburn City/Castlereagh	178,544	1,119	0.47	0.63%
Belfast	263,313	1,375	0.58	0.52%

(SFS, 2009)

5.13

The FPM suggests that the current provision of swimming pools is insufficient in meeting potential demand from the Northern Ireland population.

Approximately 14% of all weekly visits to swimming pools are unmet as a result of the unavailability of existing facilities.

5.14

It is important to note that there are a number of other facilities in Northern Ireland that offer aquatic activities, including private sports clubs and hotels. There are also a number of 'leisure' pools operated by District Councils, and others that are equipped with flumes and play areas. Although their value to physical recreation is recognised, these facilities, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, have not been included in this analysis.

5.15

The Facilities Planning Analysis is supported by a comparison study between Northern Ireland's swimming pool provision to other regions of the United Kingdom. The following table shows the average results:

Table Six - Swimming Pool Comparative Analysis

	England & Scotland	Northern Ireland
25m pools	1 pool per 34,500 people	1 pool per 43,800 people
50m pools	1 pool per 1,205,600 people	1 pool per 1,710,300 people

(SFS, 2009)

* Table six assumes the construction of a 50m pool in North Down

5.16

During a recent audit of all sports facilities in Northern Ireland, facility providers indicated that the current swimming pool provision is insufficient in addressing demand. As noted below, Swim Ulster and representatives from swimming organisations expressed concerns about the lack of pool time and related restrictions for club training.

5.17

Many pool operators have also informed SNI that because of the limited availability of pool time, there are lengthy waiting lists for persons wishing to attend swimming classes.

5.18

Accessibility

As noted above, there are a number of other pools in Northern Ireland located in schools, hotels and private leisure clubs. However, many of these swimming pools are only suitable for recreational swimming, whilst others are not generally accessible to many user groups.

5.18.1

Swim Ulster has advised that many swimming clubs and their members have difficulty gaining access to suitable swimming pools on a regular basis for training and competition. When pools are made available for training it is often for limited periods and at unsociable times.

5.19

Universal Access

Although all public swimming pools are required to provide suitable access for persons with disabilities under DDA regulations, there are some swimming facilities in Northern Ireland that are not fully accessible, particularly to wheelchair users. Further research is required regarding access arrangements at swimming facilities for persons with disabilities.

5.20

Specification

The majority of swimming pools provided by District Councils are 25m in length (the preferable dimension for short course competition). However, not all pools are of the appropriate width for hosting competitive events and only a limited number have a floating floor that would enable the pool to have a consistent depth as preferred for competitive swimming and required for elite events.

5.20.1

It is anticipated that Northern Ireland's first 50m pool will open in 2011. In addition to providing much needed pool area, this will offer a facility for high performance athletes and a venue for major competition. This pool will have two floating floors, meaning a depth of two metres can be maintained, consistent with international requirements. A second pool (25m in length) will also be provided, offering warm-up and cool-down facilities for competitors.

5.20.2

Swim Ulster has recommended that pools for club and competitive use should be built to the following specifications: 25m (length); 6/8 lanes at 2.5m each (width); and with adjustable floating floors to enable a depth of two metres from end to end.

5.21

Condition

Many pools in Northern Ireland were built over 25 years ago, and although several have been refurbished, they have a limited life span.

SNI research has identified that many of the current stock of swimming pools, particularly the ancillary facilities, are in need of major refurbishment or significant upgrading to meet the expectations and requirements of community participation and club swimming.

5.22

Summation of findings/recommendations

There is a deficit in current swimming provision in order to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland population, and although the provision of a 50m pool will be a welcome addition, further provision will still be required. It is unrealistic to expect every swimming pool in Northern Ireland to meet the specifications for high performance or club swimming, however, such facilities should be provided on a strategic basis, along with an appropriate mix of attractive and fit for purpose aquatic facilities. A programme of refurbishment for some public pools and the development of a number of appropriate new facilities would be adequate to address the current shortfall.

Tennis Courts

5.23

Quantity

This analysis excludes all education facilities (as public access is limited – see section below on accessibility). District Council, club and private tennis facilities have been included at 100% capacity.

There is the possibility that because of the influence of Gaelic sport in Northern Ireland, the parameters used in this analysis may not be as readily transferable to Northern Ireland as to other areas of the United Kingdom.

Total existing provision:	256 tennis courts
Total provision required:	868 tennis courts

(Only two facilities in Northern Ireland have permanent indoor courts; however, a limited number of other facilities have temporary covers to facilitate play during the winter months.)

total shortfall of provision
612 tennis courts

5.24

Areas of particular need

The following tables show the number of unmet visits to tennis courts in Northern Ireland and make recommendations for the number of courts required to address unmet demand.

Table Seven calculates unmet demand and facility need for the existing 26 District Councils, whilst Table Eight calculates need based on the 11 proposed Local Government Districts.

Both tables prioritise facility need by District Council area by calculating the unmet visits per head of population.

Table Seven - **26 District Council Calculations**

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Tennis Courts Required	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Strabane	40,107	1,514	17	3.77%
Derry	110,485	3,975	46	3.60%
Magherafelt	43,682	1,547	18	3.54%
Cookstown	35,238	1,217	14	3.45%
Belfast	263,313	8,931	103	3.39%
Down	69,189	2,222	26	3.21%
Armagh	57,704	1,838	21	3.19%
Newry and Mourne	95,325	3,027	35	3.18%
Ballymena	61,039	1,929	22	3.16%
Ballymoney	30,229	949	11	3.14%
Dungannon	50,995	1,571	18	3.08%
Omagh	51,661	1,587	18	3.07%
Lisburn	112,450	3,447	40	3.07%
Antrim	50,675	1,550	18	3.06%
Craigavon	85,946	2,628	30	3.06%
Limavady	36,014	1,091	13	3.03%
Banbridge	46,909	1,399	16	2.98%
Newtownabbey	81,714	2,354	27	2.88%
Carrickfergus	40,096	1,136	13	2.83%
Fermanagh	60,739	1,657	19	2.73%
Castlereagh	66,094	1,745	20	2.64%
North Down	78,020	2,057	24	2.64%
Ards	77,862	1,925	22	2.47%
Coleraine	57,045	1,080	12	1.89%
Larne	31,243	566	7	1.81%
Moyle	17,148	307	4	1.79%

(SFS, 2009)

Table Eight - 11 Proposed Local Government Districts' Calculations

Area	Projected Population 2011	Unmet Demand – Visits per Week	Tennis Courts Required	Shortfall by Unmet Visits to Population Percentage
Derry City/Strabane	150,592	5,489	63	3.64%
Belfast	263,313	8,931	103	3.39%
Mid Ulster District Council	129,915	4,335	50	3.34%
Newry City/Down	164,514	5,249	60	3.19%
Armagh City/Bann	190,559	5,865	67	3.08%
Antrim/Newtownabbey	132,389	3,904	45	2.95%
Lisburn City/Castlereagh	178,544	5,192	60	2.91%
Fermanagh/Omagh	112,400	3,244	37	2.89%
Mid-Antrim District Council	132,378	3,631	42	2.74%
Ards/NorthDown	155,882	3,982	46	2.55%
Causeway Coast	140,436	3,427	39	2.44%

(SFS, 2009)

5.25

The FPM suggests a 78% under-provision of tennis courts in Northern Ireland. However, as stated above, the parameters used for this analysis do not take into account the influence of Gaelic Sport or indeed the overwhelming demand for pitch-based sports in Northern Ireland.

It is considered unrealistic and unnecessary to address 100% of the tennis court deficit. SNI has assessed the shortfall in tennis facilities and factored in the research findings for other key facility types in order to provide a more accurate interpretation of the shortfall.

The influence of Gaelic games and other pitch sports have been considered, along with the condition and locations of the existing tennis court provision in Northern Ireland. SNI therefore believes that an estimated 40% of the identified shortfall should be addressed. This document advises readers to subtract 60% from the shortfall identified in the relevant geographical areas.

5.26

The Facilities Planning analysis is supported by a comparison study between Northern Ireland's tennis court provision to other regions of the United Kingdom. The following table shows the average results:

Table Nine - **Tennis Court Comparative Analysis**

	England & Scotland	Northern Ireland
Outdoor courts	1 court per 3,700 people	1 court per 6,200 people
Indoor courts	1 court per 39,500 people	1 court per 171,000 people

(SFS, 2009)

5.27

During a recent audit of all sports facilities in Northern Ireland, providers indicated that the current provision of tennis courts is insufficient in addressing demand.

Many providers also suggested that if existing underspecified courts were refurbished to a suitable standard, the shortfall in tennis courts could be significantly reduced.

5.28

Accessibility

Many existing tennis courts in Northern Ireland are operated by the education sector, and as previously stated, only 47% of schools make their facilities available to outside groups.

The shortfall in appropriate tennis facilities, particularly courts suitable for competition, has resulted in a significant increase in the number of private facilities that offer court time and ancillary facilities for annual membership fees. These clubs are generally not available for 'pay as you play' or casual use.

5.28.1

Tennis has become a “12 month” sport and the demand to play throughout the year is increasing. Not all courts are floodlit, and daylight patterns throughout much of the year limit play. A few outdoor courts at private clubs are covered with floodlit temporary structures throughout the winter months. These courts are well used but are generally only available to club members.

5.28.2

Many District Council tennis facilities are converted into five-a-side areas during the winter months to ease growing pressures on sports halls and synthetic pitches.

5.29

Universal Access

A significant number of wheelchair users utilise indoor tennis facilities throughout the year, and although clay, grass and carpet courts are acceptable, a hard court is the preferred surface. Tennis wheelchairs are wider than standard sports wheelchairs and therefore additional space is required within ancillary facilities – in particular, door widths and changing facilities.

5.30

Specification

The majority of tennis courts in Northern Ireland are of appropriate size and run-off areas, however many do not have floodlighting. As stated above, only two facilities provide indoor courts and a very limited number of outdoor courts can facilitate winter play.

5.30.1

The SNI database has identified many tennis facilities with inappropriate surfaces (eg. gravel/shale and rough tarmac) that do not meet the needs of the governing body or the expectations of the public. Although there are a variety of suitable surfaces including sand-dressed, porous concrete and polymeric courts, there is a deficit in surfaces such as acrylic and artificial clay, which are favoured by elite competitors.

5.31

Condition

Research findings from the Background Paper (2009) identifies that 13% of all tennis facilities in Northern Ireland are surfaced with rough tarmac or gravel/shale, and in most cases will be unused because of their unappealing and unsafe nature.

A number of other courts are in an advanced state of disrepair (uneven surfaces, damaged netting etc) whilst others have become a focal point for anti-social behaviour.

5.32

Summation of findings/recommendations

Tennis Ireland (Ulster Branch) supports a programme of refurbishment to upgrade existing surfaces and increase floodlit provision. The Ulster Branch also conveyed aspirations to develop high performance centres, with indoor acrylic or artificial clay surfaces in the Greater Belfast area. As a solution to the shortfall in suitable indoor provision, Tennis Ireland (Ulster Branch) is encouraging clubs or facilities with appropriate surface types to erect a “bubble” over their outdoor courts.

Athletics Facilities

5.33

Quantity

As in research undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, only 400m synthetic tracks were considered in this analysis as other surfaces and track lengths are not deemed appropriate for anything other than recreational use.

This analysis references the width of athletics tracks against the FPM average of six lanes. However, three athletics tracks in Northern Ireland are eight lanes in width, and this has been taken into account in this analysis.

Number of existing athletics facilities:	8
Total athletics facilities needed:	11

total shortfall of provision: 3

5.34

Areas of particular need

5.34.1

A table of recommendations based on the 26 District Councils cannot be offered for athletics facilities. The Facilities Planning Model suggests that there is a shortfall of three athletics facilities in Northern Ireland and therefore it would be meaningless to spread this shortfall over the existing 26 District Council areas or the 11 proposed Local Government Districts.

5.34.2

When comparing Northern Ireland's existing track provision against the recommendations of UK Athletics (one track per 250,000 people) it would appear that there are sufficient tracks to satisfy demand. It can therefore be assumed that the shortfall identified by the Facilities Planning Model relates to indoor provision.

5.34.3

During a recent audit of all sports facilities in Northern Ireland, facility providers and users indicated that whilst the current provision of outdoor tracks is sufficient in addressing most of the demand, there may be a number of areas in Northern Ireland where excessive travel time is required to access a track.

There is also a need for indoor facilities to be located immediately adjacent to existing outdoor facilities in order to accommodate high performance training.

5.34.4

At the time of writing this document, two applications have been submitted to the Elite Facilities Programme for indoor provision to be located adjacent to the 400m tracks.

5.34.5

There is also a 400m synthetic track at Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn. However, as this facility is generally only available to military personnel, this track has not been included in the analysis.

5.35

The Facilities Planning Analysis is supported by a comparison study between Northern Ireland's athletics provision to other regions of the United Kingdom. Table Ten shows the average results:

Table Ten - Athletics Facilities Comparative Analysis

	England & Scotland	Northern Ireland
Athletics Facilities	1 facility per 185,000 people	1 facility per 214,000 people

(SFS, 2009)

5.36

Accessibility

All 400m synthetic athletics tracks in Northern Ireland are District Council/community owned and are readily accessible. Most of these facilities will provide access for an annual membership fee, or on a 'pay as you play' basis.

5.37

Universal Access

Although much of the existing athletics provision in Northern Ireland is DDA compliant, it is important that ancillary facilities such as changing/shower rooms are considered and should always be appropriate for sports wheelchairs, which are generally wider than standard wheelchairs.

5.37.1

None of the existing athletics provision provides permanent wheelchair clamps for throwing events and these would be required for usage by paralympic athletes.

5.38

Specification

All synthetic athletics tracks in Northern Ireland are surfaced with impervious polyurethane, which is the surface required by the United Kingdom governing body for competitive events, and all tracks are appropriately floodlit to governing body specification.

5.38.1

Northern Ireland requires an indoor performance area of 132m x 24m (incorporating 8 x 132m lanes) immediately beside a 6 or 8 lane 400m synthetic track in order for athletes to train and compete to an elite standard.

5.38.2

Indoor facilities must be surfaced with an appropriate training floor and be of appropriate height for throwing events and pole-vault. Lighting should comply with the requirements of the governing body.

5.39

Condition

All existing athletics facilities in Northern Ireland are in good condition. Tracks are re-laid when required, and the throwing and jumping areas are generally well maintained.

5.40

Summation of findings/Recommendations

NI Athletics has advised that whilst they are generally happy with the quantity and quality of synthetic tracks in Northern Ireland, they recognise that travel time to a track in some areas of Northern Ireland is excessive, particularly in South Down, the Coleraine Area, and in the Craigavon area. NI Athletics also emphasised that the current indoor facilities do not meet the high performance criteria of UK Athletics. The governing body has indicated that indoor facilities are required to develop the sport at all levels, but are particularly important for preparing Northern Ireland's athletes for international competition.

Research Findings - Section One

Grass and Synthetic Pitches

5.41

Quantity

This analysis calculated the recommended need for grass pitches using the Fields in Trust (FIT) standard: three acres of pitches per 1000 head of population. It also calculated the average size of a grass pitch at 2.5 acres. (This figure is an average of the size of a soccer pitch, a rugby pitch and a Gaelic games pitch.)

No account is taken of the prominence of Gaelic Sport (predominantly played on grass pitches) in this analysis, which may well result in an even greater demand for pitch space in Northern Ireland than the rest of the United Kingdom.

Pitches within the school estate and all gravel/shale pitches have been excluded from the calculations for reasons explained later in the text.

Number of existing acres	3,180
Total acres recommended:	5,253
Total acres needed:	2,072

To put the identified shortfall into perspective, 2,221 acres is equivalent to:

**829 Grass Pitches, or
207 Synthetic Pitches, or
Any combination thereof**

5.42

Areas of particular need

The following tables show Northern Ireland's existing pitch provision against the recommendations of the Six Acre Standard (SAS) and calculate the shortfall.

Table Eleven calculates unmet demand and facility need for the existing 26 District Councils, whilst Table Twelve calculates need based on the 11 proposed Local Government Districts.

Both tables prioritise facility need by District Council area by calculating the unmet visits per head of population.

As stated above, SNI calculates a synthetic surface as that of four grass pitches.

Table Eleven - 26 District Council Calculations

District Council	2011 Population Projection	Acres Recommended by SAS	EXISTING PROVISION				SHORTFALLS		
			Grass	Synthetic		Total Acres of Pitches	SNI Standard		
			Grass Acres	Synthetic Acres	SNI Standard x 4		Perceived Acres Shortfall	Pitches Required	Shortfall by Acre to Population
Carrickfergus	40,096	120	39.62	1.48	5.92	45.54	75	30	0.19%
North Down	78,020	234	66.69	3.87	15.48	82.17	152	61	0.19%
Antrim	50,675	152	54.76	1.49	5.96	60.72	91	37	0.18%
Ards	77,862	234	79.23	3.26	13.04	92.27	141	57	0.18%
Castlereagh	66,094	198	47.79	7.14	28.56	76.35	122	49	0.18%
Derry	110,485	331	107.66	6.33	25.32	132.98	198	79	0.18%
Lisburn	112,450	337	99.95	8.57	34.28	134.23	203	81	0.18%
Newtownabbey	81,714	245	62.55	8.04	32.16	94.71	150	60	0.18%
Coleraine	57,045	171	74.63	1.29	5.16	79.79	91	37	0.16%
Larne	31,243	94	36.04	1.93	7.72	43.76	50	20	0.16%
Banbridge	46,909	141	46.42	5.99	23.96	70.38	70	28	0.15%
Ballymena	61,039	183	94.72	1.48	5.92	100.64	82	33	0.14%
Ballymoney	30,229	91	44.55	1.81	7.24	51.79	39	16	0.13%
Belfast	263,313	790	369.69	32.49	130	499.65	290	116	0.11%
Down	69,189	208	131.64	1.29	5.16	136.8	71	28	0.10%
Armagh	57,704	173	106.27	4.06	16.24	122.51	51	20	0.09%
Craigavon	85,946	258	169.8	2.47	9.88	179.68	78	31	0.09%
Cookstown	35,238	106	74.21	1.29	5.16	79.37	26	11	0.07%
Fermanagh	60,739	182	139.86	1.49	5.96	145.82	36	15	0.06%
Strabane	40,107	120	94.7	1.43	5.72	100.42	20	8	0.05%
Dungannon	50,995	153	126.58	1.29	5.16	131.74	21	8	0.04%
Newry & Mourne	95,325	286	229.89	7.48	29.92	259.81	26	10	0.03%
Omagh	51,661	155	120.5	6.58	26.32	146.82	8	3	0.02%
Limavady	36,014	108	107.01	2.82	11.28	118.29	-10	-4	-0.03%
Magherafelt	43,682	131	116.54	5.71	22.84	139.38	-8	-3	-0.02%
Moyle	17,148	51	51.4	0.89	3.56	54.96	-4	-1	-0.02%
TOTALS	1,750,922	5,253	2,692.7	121.97	487.9	3,180.58	2,072	829	

* SAS – Six Acre Standard

(SFS, 2009)

Research Findings - Section One

Table Twelve - **11 Proposed Local Government Districts' Calculations**

District Council	2011 Population Projection	Acres Recommended by SAS	EXISTING PROVISION				SHORTFALLS		
			Grass	Synthetic		Total Acres of Pitches	SNI Standard		
			Grass Acres	Synthetic Acres	SNI Standard x 4		Perceived Acres Shortfall	Pitches Required	Shortfall by Acre to Population
Ards/ North Down	155,882	468	146	7	29	174	293	117	0.19%
Lisburn City/ Castlereagh	178,544	535.632	147.74	15.71	62.84	210.58	325.05	130	0.18%
Antrim/ Newtownabbey	132,389	397.167	117.31	9.53	38.12	155.43	241.74	97	0.18%
Mid-Antrim	132,378	397.134	170.38	4.89	19.56	189.94	207.19	83	0.16%
Derry City/ Strabane	150,592	451.776	202.36	7.76	31.04	233.4	218.38	87	0.15%
Belfast	263,313	789.939	369.69	32.49	130	499.65	290.29	116	0.11%
Armagh City/ Bann	190,559	571.677	322.49	12.52	50.08	372.57	199.11	80	0.10%
Causeway Coast	140,436	421.308	277.59	6.81	27.24	304.83	116.48	47	0.08%
Newry City/ Down	164,514	493.542	361.53	8.77	35.08	396.61	96.932	39	0.06%
Fermanagh/ Omagh	112,400	337.2	260.36	8.07	32.28	292.64	44.56	18	0.04%
Mid-Ulster District Council	129,915	389.745	317.33	8.29	33.16	350.49	39.255	16	0.03%
TOTALS	1,750,922	5,252.77	2,692.7	121.97	487.9	3,180.58	2,072.2	829	

(SFS, 2009)

5.43

An analysis of grass pitches suggests that there is a substantial under-provision when compared to the recommendations of the SAS. Approximately 829 grass pitches (or any grass/synthetic combination) would be required to address unmet demand throughout Northern Ireland.

5.44

FIT (2008) suggests that the median level of pitch provision in Northern Ireland is approximately 1.2 acres per 1000 population, compared to the median level of provision of 2.8 acres per 1000 population in England.

These results indicate a substantial difference in pro-rata provision between the two countries.

5.45

A number of applications have been received in recent years by the Planning Service for permission to 'build' on existing pitches. Although in many cases planning permission has been refused, there are some facilities that have been lost to housing and commercial development.

Grass Pitches

5.46

Accessibility

Some pitches are owned by clubs or governing bodies, and generally these facilities are available to members of the respective organisations. A significant number are operated by the education sector, and as previously stated, only 47% of schools make their facilities available to outside groups. As will be detailed below, grass pitches have finite usage rates, and clubs and schools generally utilise their grass facilities to (and often above) recommended usage rates.

5.46.1

In addition, some council pitches are 'block booked' by specific teams, although others are available on a 'first-come, first-served' basis to the general public.

5.47

Universal Access

Grass is generally not an appropriate surface for wheelchair users; therefore, it may be appropriate for other surfaces to be made available for persons with disabilities.

5.48

Specification

The majority of pitches in Northern Ireland are of appropriate dimensions for their respective sports. In some cases, pitches double up for two or more sports and are marked accordingly.

5.49

Condition

Grass is the preferred surface for soccer, rugby and Gaelic games, however grass pitches can only sustain a recommended 300/350 hours of use per year (6/7 hours per week). In addition, for approximately eight months of the year, daylight hours are limited in Northern Ireland and therefore the use of grass pitches is considerably reduced. These restrictions, and the identified shortfall, results in excessive use and saturation of grass pitches at peak times, resulting in the inability for many clubs/teams to find suitable training or competition venues. Excessive use of grass pitches causes significant deterioration, particularly during the winter months, and it is therefore undesirable to floodlight a grass pitch for community use.

5.49.1

Many grass pitches in Northern Ireland are in poor condition and are generally in a state of considerable disrepair. This is often due to insufficient maintenance programmes and poor security arrangements. This adds to the problem of limited provision, and further research is required to assess the extent of this problem.

5.50

Summation of findings/Recommendations

Summation of findings follows the analysis of synthetic pitch provision.

Synthetic Pitches

5.51

In recent years there has been a notable increase in the provision and use of synthetic pitches. Recent innovations have resulted in significant improvements in the performance of such pitches, and these facilities now complement the use of natural grass for many sports. The SAS assesses the provision of a suitable synthetic surface to equate to twice that of a grass surface of similar size. However, SNI believes that in some instances, synthetic pitches can equate to four times that of a grass surface.

5.52

During a recent audit of all sports facilities in Northern Ireland, facility providers strongly indicated that demand outstripped supply for synthetic surfaces, and in some cases facilities have extended their opening hours beyond midnight in order to satisfy demand.

Discussions with governing bodies and various user groups also identified difficulties in booking synthetic surfaces.

5.53

Accessibility

Some synthetic pitches in Northern Ireland are owned by clubs or governing bodies (particularly water-based facilities), and generally these facilities are exclusive to members of the respective organisations. A number of synthetic pitches are also operated by the education sector, but as previously stated, only 47% of schools would be prepared to make their facilities available to outside groups. The majority of synthetic pitches in Northern Ireland are operated by District Councils and are generally available to all, however as identified above, a significant shortfall remains.

5.53.1

Recognising the shortfall in synthetic provision, the private sector is showing an interest in availing of the opportunity to address the shortfall by developing and operating 'pay as you play' facilities.

5.54

Universal Access

Some synthetic facilities are universally accessible; however, consideration must be given to the design or refurbishment of ancillary facilities. While most are DDA-compliant, they may not be suited to accommodating sports wheelchairs.

5.55

Specification

There are various types of synthetic pitches available:

5.55.1

Gravel/Shale

Although there are over 160 gravel/shale pitches in Northern Ireland, this surface is dated, considered unsafe and does not meet the performance specification of any sport. These facilities, even if floodlit, remain largely unused even in areas where there is a considerable pitch deficit.

5.55.2

Sand-Filled/Sand-Dressed

Sand-filled and sand-dressed surfaces are generally suited to multi-sport activities and have a major role in pitch provision in Northern Ireland.

Sand-dressed surfaces have a short, high density pile and are particularly suitable for small ball sports such as hockey and tennis. Sand-filled surfaces have a longer, low density pile and are generally suitable for both small and big ball sports. However, some governing bodies have expressed concerns that these surfaces are unpredictable and 3rd Generation is now the preferred choice for soccer, rugby and Gaelic games.

5.55.3

Water-Based

Water-based is the preferred surface for competitive hockey but it is very specific to this sport and not appropriate for community usage. Nevertheless, water-based pitches have an important role to play in facility provision in Northern Ireland.

5.55.4

3rd Generation

3rd Generation is a 'state-of-the-art' surface and the preferred synthetic choice for 'big ball' sports (soccer, Gaelic games and rugby). There are a limited number of 3rd Generation surfaces in Northern Ireland, but like sand-filled and sand-based surfaces, these are already being substantially utilised.

3rd Generation, like other synthetic surfaces, can sustain a very high usage capacity and therefore could be considered as the most appropriate surface to provide for community use and performance sport.

5.56

Existing synthetic provision encompasses a variety of pitch sizes. Some facilities are full-size, whilst others are scaled-down variations of the respective sports and for training purposes. Both full-size and scaled-down pitches provide useful facilities for the development and delivery of sport, and it is important that an appropriate mix is provided throughout Northern Ireland.

5.57

Condition

As stated above, there are over 160 gravel/shale pitches in Northern Ireland that remain largely unused, even in areas where there is a considerable pitch deficit.

5.57.1

2nd and 3rd Generation synthetic surfaces (as detailed above) have a recommended life span of 10 years, depending on the quality of the carpet and provided they are suitably maintained. A number of the existing synthetic surfaces in Northern Ireland are due for replacement. These facilities are often utilised to capacity, and the condition of these surfaces has deteriorated with usage. Therefore, a suitable replacement strategy must be implemented by the operators.

5.57.2

The world's governing bodies of the three 'big ball' sports have already approved the use of 3rd Generation surfaces for competition. However, this has not been reflected by some of the local 'big ball' governing bodies and particularly the local leagues.

5.58

Summation of findings/Recommendations

Some grass pitches in Northern Ireland are sustaining up to five times the recommended hours of use, causing significant deterioration, particularly during the winter months. It is also inappropriate to floodlight grass pitches for community use, and therefore these pitches cannot sustain additional usage. This excessive and saturated use of grass pitches at peak times has resulted in the inability for many clubs/teams to find suitable training or competition venues.

5.58.1

A solution to these problems could be addressed through the provision of quality synthetic services. This type of facility, if floodlit, can sustain four times the average use of a grass pitch and can provide a facility during the peak hours. As stated above, the surface can also be expected to have an approximate 10-year life expectancy if properly maintained. This is estimated to cost £30,000 per annum, including an annual £10,000 sinking fund for the replacement of the carpet at the end of its life span.

Facilities for Other Sports

6.1

In addition to the sporting facilities analysed above, there are also significant shortfalls in the quality and quantity of facility provision for a number of other sporting activities. At present, Northern Ireland does not have a velodrome; a rowing basin; a volleyball facility suitable for representative competition; a venue with a performance floor dedicated for basketball etc. Many sporting organisations have expressed concerns regarding access arrangements to the limited stock of facilities relevant to their particular sports.

6.1.1

It is anticipated that the Elite Facilities Programme will address some of the deficit in the provision of high performance centres, whilst also providing a contribution to the existing stock of 'community' facilities.

6.1.2

The Elite Facilities Programme, which is responsible for creating a facilities legacy in Northern Ireland from the London 2012 Olympic Games, will deliver a number of new and upgraded facilities that meet high performance specifications for cycling; rowing; swimming; basketball; volleyball; sailing; tennis; athletics; and martial arts.

6.1.3

A number of these facilities will be of United Kingdom and all-island significance, with the others being strategically important to sport in Northern Ireland. The development of these facilities means that Northern Ireland's athletes, in some disciplines, will no longer be required to travel to train in facilities that provide the same specifications as elite competition venues. These high performance facilities will also increase the profile of Northern Ireland with many European/World governing bodies, therefore providing NI with the opportunity to host a number of major events.

The Elite Facilities Programme, operated by SNI, will deliver high quality training facilities and competition venues for a number of Olympic sports.

Spectator Facilities (including commercial and community uses at larger venues)

6.2

According to research findings from the Survey of Public Attitudes towards Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland (2008), 28% of the population attend sporting events in Northern Ireland as spectators. A further 8% stated that they would be encouraged to spectate at fixtures if better facilities were provided.

6.2.1

Spectator facilities at larger venues are important for a number of reasons: they provide outlets for staging high-profile sporting events; they can address the needs of local and international competition; they generate revenue, that in many cases is used to improve 'grass routes' development.

In addition, spectating at sporting events provides an excellent social outlet for the population, and can often be an inspiration to many, particularly the young.

6.2.2

In Great Britain there has been a significant improvement in spectator facilities in the 'post-Hillsborough era'. These improvements have been driven by legislation that followed a number of well-documented disasters at sporting events in the 1970s and 1980s, and by a considerable injection of public funding that attracted a high level of private investment.

6.2.3

This has led to improvements in spectator behaviour; changes in attendance profile, with large increases in the numbers of women and families attending fixtures; an increase in media interest; and significant increases in the numbers attending despite the increase of 'live fixtures' shown on television.

6.2.4

Improvements in spectator accommodation have also led to increases in secondary spend, improved marketing and corporate hospitality opportunities. In addition, the venue operators have sought to 'sweat their assets' both by generating revenue from non-match day activities (such as utilising the grounds for seminars, weddings etc) and by capitalising on the names of the respective clubs and hosting community-based activities at their venues. Partnerships between the clubs and government agencies have proved to be beneficial to both parties. It enabled government agencies to engage with many groups that were reluctant to attend educational and health care activities at more mainstream premises, whilst enabling clubs to rent facility space and attract grant monies.

6.2.5

In addition, the improved spectator facilities and attendant benefits have attracted many high-profile events to Great Britain, including the European Soccer Championships in June 1996. The international governing bodies would not have considered such a scenario in the 1970s/1980s.

Spectator Facilities (continued)

6.2.6

Legislation relating to spectator safety at venues in Northern Ireland was introduced in February 2006 and is in the process of being implemented. Funding has been made available to the operators of local venues since 2000, although not yet on the scale that was made available to venue operators in Great Britain. The safety arrangements at many of the larger venues in Northern Ireland fall significantly below the standards at venues in Great Britain. The implementation of the Safety at Sports Grounds Order is likely to severely restrict the numbers of spectators that could be admitted to these venues unless substantive structural improvements are undertaken. This is of particular concern to the venues that host the more attractive fixtures of rugby, soccer and Gaelic sport.

6.3

Requirements

In order to maximise spectator attendances, that will in turn deliver the benefits to sport in Northern Ireland as listed above, a number of facilities will be required.

6.3.1

A stadium(s) with a safe capacity(s) capable of hosting the major fixtures of soccer, rugby and Gaelic sport.

The stadium(s) should meet the technical requirements of the sports and have the facilities expected of such a venue, including suitable hospitality arrangements, media facilities, universal access arrangements etc. The stadium(s) should be self-sustaining and not place an ongoing burden on the public purse or the governing bodies.

6.3.2

An appropriate number of quality venues for major clubs with appropriate safe capacities, in line with the Facility Strategies of the respective sports to enable the grounds to host fixtures at an appropriate level. These venues should be spectator friendly, with facilities that would enable them to host athlete development, community sporting and non-sporting activities. Appropriate ground sharing should be considered, as should the use of synthetic surfaces to facilitate community use. Clubs should form partnerships with District Councils and others to ensure that suitable support facilities such as additional pitches (including where possible, appropriate indoor pitches) could be utilised.

6.3.3

An appropriate number of venues for smaller clubs with appropriate safe capacities, in line with the Facility Strategies of the respective sports to enable the grounds to host fixtures at an appropriate level. Again, where appropriate, ground sharing should be considered, as should the use of synthetic surfaces to facilitate community use. (As previously stated, the world's governing bodies have already approved the use of 3rd Generation surfaces for competition. However, this has not been reflected by many of the local leagues.)

6.3.4

Venues that host sports that traditionally do not attract significant spectator numbers on a regular basis, but do from time to time stage 'glamour events', should have space to and access arrangements for modular seating and ancillary facilities. The provision of temporary facilities would enable such events to be attracted to and staged in Northern Ireland, whilst addressing the expectations of the spectators.

Performance Development Centres (PDCs)

6.4

In addition to the Elite Facilities associated with their respective events, 'high performance athletes and development squads' require ancillary facilities that offer conditioning equipment and specialised services to enable them to maximise their potential.

6.4.1

The Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) at Jordanstown provides up to 100 athletes from across Northern Ireland with support and specialist services that enable them to improve their competitive capacity.

6.4.2

Although SINI is well equipped to address many of the requirements of 'high performance athletes and development squads', many users are faced with an unreasonable travel time to access the facilities. In addition, some sports advise that they have performers (particularly in the younger age groups) that could benefit from the facilities and services at Jordanstown, but because the venue operates at or close to capacity, these athletes are unable to secure a place at the Institute. SINI staff have reported that many young athletes arrive with a lack of basic knowledge on issues such as strength and conditioning techniques, nutrition and lifestyle management.

6.4.3

It is therefore important that a number of satellite facilities are located across Northern Ireland, with appropriate services to enable high performance athletes to avail of strength and conditioning equipment. These facilities should also offer support services, enabling athletes to reduce their visits to Jordanstown whilst following the programmes prescribed by their 'high performance' managers. The satellite venues would also increase the number of 'up and coming' athletes who could benefit from the specialist facilities available in Northern Ireland.

6.4.4

PDCs should ideally be located at an 'Elite Facility'. However, as much of the equipment at a PDC is not specialist in nature, it could be utilised by athletes from a variety of disciplines and would not be specific to the 'host Elite Facility'.

PDCs could also be used to provide lifestyle advice to groups of younger athletes on a 'one-off' basis.

Countryside Facilities

6.5

"The countryside in Northern Ireland provides important facilities for many sports and makes a significant contribution to increasing levels of participation in physical recreation. Research has also identified the value of the natural environment on health and well-being, and the positive effects that 'Green Exercise' has on both physical and mental health." (Fit Futures Report, 2006)

6.5.1

Countryside recreation covers a wide range of activities that use air, land or water as their base. While most have their traditional home in rural areas, some may be located within urban areas, particularly in the urban fringe. Activities include walking, cycling and horse riding, as well as more active outdoor sports such as mountain biking and canoeing.

6.5.2

The Northern Ireland countryside is widely recognised as being very diverse in nature. There are seven designated 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) and many more attractive areas of countryside. Many of these areas are relatively close to and accessible from urban areas and therefore have great potential in encouraging the population to walk, cycle, horse ride or even sail in order to visit them.

6.5.3

However, issues of sustainability and concerns over land ownership and occupiers' liability mean that access to the countryside and engaging the population in recreation is more limited in Northern Ireland than other areas of the United Kingdom.

6.5.4

Primarily, countryside recreation activities are characterised by their use of, and access to, the natural resource. In Northern Ireland, this scenario means that many agencies, land owners and interest groups have responsibilities for the development and management of countryside recreation.

6.5.5

The unstructured responsibility of the countryside recreation in Northern Ireland results in a large number of resources being utilised unofficially. (For example, the Mourne Mountains.)

6.5.6

In some cases there is 'unwritten' permission from landowners to access their property, but largely, unstructured use of the countryside means it is very difficult to manage in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the condition of certain countryside recreation facilities will continue to deteriorate from over-use unless suitable policies or management tools are implemented.

6.5.7

Countryside recreation locations must be appropriately managed to ensure a balance between participation opportunities, conservation issues, and agricultural operations.

6.5.8

SNI recognises the importance of sustainable access to the countryside for sport and physical recreation, and as such promotes the principles of 'Leave No Trace' in its programmes and activities.

6.5.9

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD); SNI; and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board all have responsibilities for the protection of the environment, and also for encouraging access to natural resources for recreation.

6.5.10

The Countryside Access and Activity Network (CAAN) was created in 1999 to develop countryside facilities and recreation opportunities on behalf of these agencies. Since then, CAAN has been bringing together the organisations responsible for countryside access and recreation to address the gap in suitable countryside provision that exists between Northern Ireland and other regions of the United Kingdom and Ireland. CAAN's Operational Plan (2009) suggests that a wide range of locations and opportunities have already been developed, but a considerable demand remains for walking, off-road cycling and canoe facilities.

6.6

Analysis of countryside facilities

6.6.1

Public Rights of Way (PROW) are important countryside facilities for encouraging and promoting various forms of sport and physical recreation eg. walking, cycling and horse riding. In Great Britain there have been significant developments and improvements to PROW since the enactment of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW).

6.6.2

CROW created a new statutory right of public access to open land, comprising mountain, moor, heath, down, and registered common land. It improved the 'rights of way' legislation in Great Britain by encouraging the creation of new routes and clarifying uncertainties about existing rights.

The act also placed a stronger duty on Government Departments to have regard for the conservation and protection of sensitive designated areas, as well as providing better management arrangements for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

6.6.3

At present there is no 'countryside' legislation or policy to preserve and develop Public Rights of Way in Northern Ireland. As a result, Northern Ireland currently has the lowest number of Public Rights of Way per square mile in the United Kingdom.

6.6.4

Table Thirteen shows the deficit in the availability of Public Rights of Way in Northern Ireland when compared to England and Wales:

6.6.5

Additionally, there are very limited natural facilities for 'off-road' cycling in Northern Ireland. Mountain biking is not permitted in most forest parks, and there are currently no 'purpose built' off-road trails in the country, compared to the many excellent resources throughout Great Britain. There are also a large number of forest parks that do not permit 'family cycling', with only one designated mountain bike route developed in Northern Ireland.

Off-road cycling is recognised across the world as one of the fastest growing outdoor adventure activities and also as one of the most lucrative in terms of rural tourism, particularly when trails are developed to the standards of the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA).

6.6.6

There is also a great need to provide sustainable and structured canoe/kayak trails on the public waterways of Northern Ireland. At present there are five existing trails at various locations throughout the province but more need to be developed. Northern Ireland is currently the first region in the United Kingdom to develop these trails and the success of the existing provision has highlighted a need for further developments.

6.6.7

In order to address the facility shortfalls, access restrictions and sustainability issues of the countryside, a managed partnership approach is critical due to the number of agencies responsible for the countryside and countryside recreation.

Table Thirteen - Public Rights of Way Comparative Analysis

Country	Total Size in SQM	Miles of PROW	Length of PROW per SQM
England	50,000	118,000	2.36
Wales	8,000	20,625	2.58
N. Ireland	5,500	123	0.02

* The availability of PROW in Scotland is more complex and cannot be easily compared. (SFS, 2009)

Multi-Sport Facilities

6.7

Multi-sport facilities are generally public accessible venues which have three or more different facilities on a single site that can accommodate a variety of sports. These venues will typically combine a number of the more popular sports facilities such as those analysed earlier in this document ie. sports halls, swimming pools, tennis courts, athletics facilities and pitches (grass and synthetic).

6.7.1

These facilities generally provide variations of many indoor and/or outdoor sports and should be accompanied by excellent sports development plans and a coaching infrastructure that encourages participation, progression and personal development within a chosen sport.

6.7.2

In many European countries where multi-sport venues have been delivered to great effect, these facilities make a wide range of sports easily accessible and provide opportunities to experience a large range of activities in a structured environment. Multi-sport venues in countries such as France and the Netherlands are operated by providers from the public and private sector. They are often developed to high specifications, are excellently maintained and are upgraded appropriately in order to meet the expectations of the population.

6.7.3

In many cases, multi-sport facilities in European countries are provided in coordination with one over-arching sports club that allows the venue to be managed and co-ordinated with a balanced programme of 'pay and play', as well as structured coaching and club activities. There are however some facilities that co-ordinate a number of sports clubs in one venue.

6.7.4

Multi-sport facilities are particularly effective in improving the links between school sport and club sport. These venues allow young people to continue developing within a number of sports and can often act as the catalyst for ongoing participation and striving towards excellence. Multi-sport facilities also encourage life-long participation and reduce the likelihood of having to travel unacceptable distances to alternative venues or clubs in order to access quality coaching or facilities.

6.7.5

There are already a number of multi-sport facilities in Northern Ireland provided by the District Councils and a number of other providers. However, these facilities are generally 'pay and play' and there is often limited sports development or influence over the clubs that use these facilities. As stated earlier in this document, many public facilities in Northern Ireland are in need of significant refurbishment, and Sport Matters (2009) suggests that only 65% of the Northern Ireland population has access to a quality accredited, multi-sport facility within a 20 minute travel time.

6.7.6

If managed and coordinated in a similar manner to European models, the existing multi-sport facilities in Northern Ireland could become 'sporting hubs' for all members of the population, whilst at the same time providing much needed sports facilities. This document encourages the development of additional multi-sport facilities to address the shortfall, as well as a major refurbishment programme to upgrade the existing provision. The providers of existing facilities could also embrace local sports clubs or become pro-active in developing their own multi-sport club with appropriately qualified coaches and structured competition.

6.7.7

Multi-sport facilities in Northern Ireland should actively adopt appropriate quality standards.

Motorsport Facilities

6.8

Motorsport makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy and to the lives of the population. Some motorsports in Northern Ireland have a large spectator base and a rich sporting heritage in many parts of the country. These sports are fast and exhilarating, but participation and spectator opportunities have been somewhat limited due to the lack of appropriate facilities. Despite this problem, Northern Ireland has produced a number of world-class motorsport drivers and riders.

6.8.1

The existing provision of motorsport facilities in Northern Ireland is generally very poor and requires significant investment to either upgrade or construct new venues.

The Facilities Strategy of 2&4 Wheel (2006) suggests that more than 80% of motorsport events in Northern Ireland attract less than 500 spectators and less than 100 competitors.

6.8.2

There are a limited number of high-profile events that attract large numbers of spectators every year. However, these events are continuously hosted on temporary facilities (ie. returned to its normal state after the event) and therefore there are no participation opportunities at these venues.

6.8.3

"2&4 Wheels was formed in 2002 as the umbrella organisation for motorsport in Northern Ireland, with support from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and SNI to ensure the implementation of a strategic plan for 2&4 wheel motorsport in Northern Ireland". (2&4 Wheels Facilities Strategy, 2006.) The organisation brings together the principle governing bodies for motorsport and is responsible for delivering a major change in the way that motorsport in Northern Ireland is administered, developed and supported.

6.8.4

A motorsport Facilities Strategy has already been developed that presents a good opportunity to develop a joint programme of action between facility providers and governing bodies/clubs. By 2016, the Strategy aims to have delivered a range of sustainable and modern facilities which meet the needs of regulated motorsport in Northern Ireland.

6.8.5

There are currently 15 permanent motorsport facilities throughout Northern Ireland. Nine are only suitable for off-road events, five are short tracks used for staged rallies or karting and one venue is used solely as a road racing venue. In a number of cases, these facilities are owed by a club or private operator and only a limited number of these facilities offer equipment for hire.

6.8.6

The Draft SFS (2009) supports the proposals of 2&4 Wheels, in adopting a flexible, phased investment programme initially targeted at a small number of permanent facilities and coupled with one or two temporary venues. These proposals are based on bids from clubs and governing bodies, aimed at encouraging and supporting regulated events from grass roots to performance level. They also aim to attract private investors to partner 2&4 Wheels in either the development of new facilities, or the upgrading of existing ones.

Motorsport Facilities (continued)

6.8.7

The proposals address motorsport facilities with all surface types, catering for a wide range of disciplines from vintage cars and bikes to karting.

6.8.8

The 2&4 Wheels Motorsport Strategy aims to deliver a range of venues suitable for national, regional and local events, ensuring the provision of appropriate facilities which are safe for all levels of ability. It also aims to support the participation pathway, as well as develop facilities which will attract and support increased spectator numbers to the many events staged in Northern Ireland.

6.8.9

The 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Strategy (2006) makes two proposals to address the first level of facility provision, or 'national venues'. The first proposal involves the redevelopment of the existing Kirkistown venue into a permanent 'Grade A' facility, with the capacity to host international events. The second proposal involves developing a new 'national venue' at a suitable location that provides geographical spread across Northern Ireland and attracts private investment.

6.8.10

The Motorsport Strategy (2006) also makes a number of proposals to address the second level of facility or 'regional venues'. These proposals involve the general upgrading of a number of permanent and temporary facilities, namely Bishopscourt and including training centres at Nutts Corner and Aghadowey, for the redevelopment of grass roots participation.

6.8.11

To address the final level of facility provision, or 'local venues', the Motorsport Strategy (2006) proposes a maintenance programme to a range of permanent and temporary facilities for grass roots motorsport and regulated events, such as the Dundrod GP and the North West 200 Circuits.

6.8.12

Failure to upgrade motorsport facilities in Northern Ireland will have a negative impact on the sports. Motorsports are attractive for all ages, but without investment there will continue to be limited participation, development and spectator opportunities.

7.1

Sport plays an important role in the life of the Northern Ireland population, and sports facilities play an important role in providing the population with opportunities to participate and develop to a level of their choosing and/or ability. This in turn contributes to national well-being, including improved health, personal happiness and a greater sense of fulfilment.

7.2

There are a range of factors that limit participation in sport and physical recreation, and Sport Matters suggests that inadequate provision of sports facilities is one of the key barriers.

7.3

This document presented the findings from SNI's facilities research. Section One assessed the existing provision of sports halls, swimming pools, tennis courts, athletics facilities and pitches. The findings have identified a number of inadequacies with sports facilities and have been presented in relation to quantity, accessibility, universal access, condition and specification.

7.4

Section Two presented the views of the governing bodies in order to assess the current provision of other key facility types, such as high performance facilities; spectator facilities; performance development centres; countryside facilities; multi-sport facilities and motorsport facilities. The findings represent the aspirations of the governing bodies and reflect the plans outlined in the strategic documents of these organisations.

7.5

This Active Places Research Report was developed to offer guidance to all those involved in providing, planning, operating and funding sports facilities, as well as those interested in promoting sport at all levels in Northern Ireland. This document presents excellent opportunities for facility providers in Northern Ireland to strategically address key issues and unmet facility demand.

7.6

If we are to encourage participation in sport and physical recreation and improve the performances of our athletes, sports facilities must be fit for purpose, accessible and attractive to the general public. Modern sports facilities must be perceived as providing a safe environment that people enjoy, while at the same time meeting the sporting needs of the users.

7.7

Without fit for purpose and accessible facilities, many of the potential benefits of sport cannot be achieved and the vision of "a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport", as outlined in Sport Matters, will not be realised.

Appendix One - References

SNI (2009) Sport Matters, the Draft Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation (SM), 2009-2019.

Fields in Trust (FIT) Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play

SNI (2009) the Draft Sports Facilities Strategy for Northern Ireland (SFS), 2009-2019.

Sport Scotland (2002) the Facilities Planning Model

SNI (2009) Sports Facilities Strategy, Background Paper (SFSBP) (Unpublished)

SNI (2009) Survey of Public Attitudes towards Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland (Unpublished)

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2006) Fit Futures Report

Countryside Access and Activities Network (2006) Operational Plan 2006-2009

2&4 Wheel Motor-Sport (2006) National and Regional Facilities Strategy 2008-2016

2&4 Wheel Motor-Sport (2004) Motor-Sport Steering Group, Final Report May 2004

Appendix Two - Glossary of Terms

Sport Matters	Sport Matters, the Draft Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019
FIT	Fields in Trust
SNI	Sport Northern Ireland
FPM	Facilities Planning Model
RPA	Review of Public Administration
Background Paper	Sports Facilities Strategy for Northern Ireland, Background Paper
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
SAS	Six Acre Standard
PDC	Performance Development Centre
SINI	Sports Institute Northern Ireland
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environmental Agency
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
CAAN	Countryside Access and Activities Network
PROW	Public Rights of Way
CROW	Countryside Right of Way Act (2000)
IMBA	International Mountain Biking Association
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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