



# IRELAND 2040 National Planning Framework

Submission by the Gaelic Athletic Association

March 2017

## Summary

This document has been prepared by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) as an initial response to the Public Consultation Papers, which highlight the issues and choices that are faced in planning for Ireland's future over the next 20 years. The document attempts to broadly address the key questions for the NPF – as identified by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government – and to present the GAA's specific concerns and suggested recommendations in relation to the NPF.

## Introduction

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) welcomes the opportunity to input into the National Planning Framework (NPF), which will inform a Plan for Ireland until 2040. The GAA is Ireland's pre-eminent sporting organisation with 539,264 registered members, 367,082 registered players and 2,036 Affiliated Clubs. However, the Association is far more than a sporting organisation - the GAA is and always has been underpinned by values including promoting community identity; ensuring pride of place; and engendering a sense of belonging. The GAA is fully aligned with and supportive of the key goals articulated by the Minister in the Public Consultation Paper 'Issues & Choices' i.e. improving living standards; promoting life-long health and well-being; and ensuring people live in safe and vibrant communities.

## ‘Success’ of the National Planning Framework – Shared Vision

The first and foremost requirement in producing any Planning Framework pertains to impact. Impact - in the context of a policy, strategy or plan - is predicated on having an overarching Vision. The GAA commends the inclusion of “what will success look like?” as one of the 10 key questions for the NPF as this clearly allows for the articulation of an overarching Vision. The Vision must operate on a systemic basis i.e. through a framework, which draws together the interdependent and mutually-supportive elements, and attendant processes, that form a unified whole.

While it is the Government’s responsibility to develop a unified framework, through this submission, the GAA would like to preface further observations on Ireland’s National Planning Challenges by briefly outlining “what success will look like” in 2040 from a GAA perspective:

### 1. Physical Activity & Obesity Rates

The Association is committed to maximising participation in sport and general levels of physical activity. The GAA firmly believes that, in the past decade, it has made significant inroads in increasing participation at Child level through both the Go Games Model and the Cúl Camps respectively. The introduction of the Go Games model in 2004, underpinned by the ethos that ‘Every Child gets a Go’, has led to a phenomenal increase in the number of children playing Gaelic games. As a result of the Go Games programme, the number of children aged 10 – 12, registered as members of the GAA has increased from 39,778 in 2010 to 59,716 in 2016.

The success of the Kellogg’s GAA Cúl Camps is widely acknowledged. In 2016 the Association provided personal and inter-personal development opportunities to 127,473 boys and girls nationwide. There has been a 57% increase in participation in four years and the Cúl Camps now cater for 18% of the Primary school-going population in Ireland. Success does not happen by chance and the ever-increasing popularity of the Kellogg’s GAA Cúl Camps is a testament to the quality of and activity provided.

Furthermore, the Association has recognised the challenges of drop-off at Youth level (58%) and is committed to researching, developing and designing new and innovative models of engagement e.g. Super Games Centres. As part of a PhD Research study, undertaken in conjunction with the University of Stirling, the Association piloted a new model of participation. The practical phase of research commenced in September 2014 and concluded in March 2015, and involved piloting and testing the concept of GAA Super Games Centres in 10 participation hives across Ireland. As part of Phase 2, 430 players (males aged 12 – 16 years) attended the Centres, at a pre-determined time and place – for an hour a week – at which small-sided Gaelic games activity were organised for a total period of 24 weeks. At each session there was minimal coaching interventions at the start and end of the games period but the primary focus was upon playing games. The Super Games Centres met with an overwhelmingly positive reaction from participants as a result of a reduced fear of failure, reduced expectation to perform and positive feedback. The quantitative research revealed that: players’ intentions to drop out from the GAA decreased; stress encountered by players reduced and social identity as well as need satisfaction increased. As a direct result of the Research Study and pilot a total of 115 Super Games Centres were established across the four Provinces in 2016.

In addition to this, the Association recognises the need to provide activities for those with disabilities. The GAA has recently developed 'GAA Fun and Run' with a view to maximising inclusivity. 'GAA Fun & Run' is ideally suited to disabled, socially deprived and ethnic minority groups that all too often are excluded. 'GAA Fun & Run' will play a unique part in providing them with a strong sense of Irish cultural/heritage as is recommended in the GAA's Inclusion and Integration Strategy. Taking the aims of this document into account, it is important to ensure that full practical expression is given to the GAA core value of inclusivity. While there are great localised examples of GAA clubs catering for people with intellectual and physical disabilities, this project will help ensure that things can be approached in the most comprehensive, coherent and consistent manner possible. 'GAA Fun and Run' will provide the thousands of coaches and mentors across 2,500 club units with a purposeful activity that will enable them to grow and maintain optimum participation right across the full diversity of Irish community life.

Aside from the provision of opportunities for physical activity, the GAA's Healthy Club project is being highlighted as a best practise model in the EU-wide Erasmus+ funded Sports Clubs for Health (SCfH) project, managed by Helsinki University. Due for completion in April 2017, this initiative aims to transfer sports-related health knowledge from nine EU sports associations and federations, supported by partner universities and colleges (Waterford IT in the GAA's case), to all other sports governing bodies and clubs across Europe. One of the stated aims is to broaden the membership base and increase participation. The GAA was selected for its unique capacity to deliver well-being information and opportunities beyond health enhancing physical activity (HEPA). Of particular interest is the GAA's use of the WHO's endorsed settings approach to health promotion, which looks at making the settings in which we live, work, and socialise/play, more health enhancing.

However, despite the Association's inputs, research has revealed that more than 50% of children and young people are not getting the recommended amount of daily physical activity i.e. 60 minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity. Furthermore, only 35% of Primary and 10% of Post Primary pupils are receiving the recommended one to two hours a week of PE at school. Furthermore, current and projected levels of obesity are truly alarming. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Modelling Obesity Project presented a bleak picture of the future of children and young adults when it predicted that, by 2030, 89% of men and 85% of women in the Republic of Ireland will be overweight or obese. So far, statistics have failed to capture the irreparable damage that will be done to the civic and social fabric of this country as a result of the decline in sport participation as sport – particularly team sport – is a crucial source of social and cultural capital and well-being.

For the GAA 'success' in the context of physical activity and participation would be to reverse these trends and to ensure that, by 2040, the overwhelming majority of children and young people were receiving the recommended amount of daily physical activity and that 100% of pupils were receiving the recommended number of hours PE at school. 'Success' would also mean a reversal in the predicted trends and to ensure that by 2040, Ireland is in fact a world-leader in the fight against the obesity epidemic.

While changing the culture of inactivity may seem like a lofty ambition, the Association believes it can be achieved by adopting a series of initiatives akin to how the Irish Government tackled smoking by introducing the smoking ban. Change will require a multitude of actions all of which must crucially be underpinned by a new paradigm known as 'Play to Stay WeLL', which integrates participation in physical activity (Play to Stay) with

Wellbeing & Lifelong Learning (WeLL). 'Play to Stay WeLL' is ideally suited to providing a construct for increasing physical activity as it provides flexibility and permeability across Civic, Occupational, Recreational & Educational (CORE) domains. Key actions deriving under the paradigm include:

- Education – particularly for parents, students, teachers;
- Early Intervention – especially through the school system;
- Targeted messaging and communication – the same basic messages must be adapted to have regard for age, gender, socio-economic status etc;
- Enhanced recognition and reward for volunteers;
- Increased accessibility – targeted investment in multi-sport facilities;
- Capacity to deliver – investment in personnel who can deliver activity on the ground in communities and schools, educate individuals, support volunteers and operationalise facilities.

The actions should also be delivered in a manner that embraces the digital era and maximises the use of interactive online engagement which promotes rather than prevents physical activity. In this regard some of Ireland's major multi-national digital companies could be targeted for involvement in the dissemination of key messages and best practice.

These actions will require significant investment but – if done wisely - the return in the investment will be seen in a reduction in health expenditure and an increase in social capital and general well-being among the population. In fact, Play to Stay WeLL (Wellbeing & Lifelong Learning) provides a benchmark against which best practice – national and international – can be evaluated.

In this regard, the proposal to make provision for Wellbeing as a subject in Post Primary schools (300 – 400 hours) is a most welcome development where the new Junior Certificate Cycle is concerned. The MVA (Master of Value Laden Acumen) should ideally be linked with this as it draws together key strands – learning, volunteering and the transmission of values – where personal development and community wellbeing are concerned. The GAA is currently contributing with Insight on the 'Moving Well – Being Well' research project and it is anticipated that the findings will play a very important role in determining future interventions.

## 2. Access to Facilities

As Ireland's largest sporting organisation, the provision of quality facilities and the development of a network of same is obviously a topic of major concern for the GAA. This is understandable when one has regard for the fact that, on a daily basis, the Association must cater for its 539,264 registered members, 367,082 registered players and 2,036 Affiliated Clubs. This does not include the phenomenal number of Primary and Post-Primary school teams nor the activities of the Association's sister organisations - Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) and the Camogie Association, which are also provided with access to facilities. The role of these facilities in enhancing civic society is also apparent as GAA clubs nationwide serve as social hubs for the broader community through providing indoor halls for exercise classes and floodlit perimeter paths for walking.

Notwithstanding the fact that generations of GAA volunteers have dedicated time, money and efforts to ensuring that their Clubs and Counties have excellent facilities, the requirement for fit-for-purpose, high quality facilities continues to increase, particularly in urban areas.

In this regard, the Association would see an opportunity for engagement with the Department to ensure a more joined-up approach in relation to the development of sports facilities. A key priority of the Association is the provision of fit for purpose, all weather, full-length, floodlit pitches so that activity can take place year-round regardless of the prevailing weather. This requirement is particularly acute in urbanised areas that do not have access to Third Level facilities e.g. Ennis, Wexford Town, Drogheda etc. It is incontrovertible that many other sporting organisations have the same requirements.

Therefore, the Association believes that success in this context will be achieved through a collaborative approach, with sports stakeholders cooperating to successfully identify priority areas nationwide where sports facilities can be developed to the benefit of all those involved by 2040.

### 3. Anticipating and Addressing Demographic Change

The GAA can often be a barometer for how well communities are faring. The emphasis on teams, on participation and local identity gives people a real and motivating sense of social identity. The GAA is one of the vehicles through which rural areas can retain a sense of collective purpose. On the flip-side, in an urban context, it provides a sense of community and a collective focal point, which might otherwise be absent. The vibrancy - or otherwise - of the GAA as a good approximation for the wider well-being of a particular location.

Currently there are real reasons to be very concerned about the well-being and the prospects for many of our rural areas. The GAA is struggling in many of these areas—to field teams, to fund activities and maintain facilities. The people living in these areas are struggling to find work and when they are it very often involves long commutes. The result is economically and socially hollowed-out areas. Conversely, in urban areas, the GAA is struggling to adapt the traditional parish-based model to the sprawling conurbations that have developed, particularly on the East Coast (see Appendix I for a case study contrasting challenges faced in South Kerry and Kildare),

The dual challenge of rural depopulation and increasing urbanisation is something that has exercised minds since the days of the Mac Namee Commission Report in 1971 and has been repeatedly emphasised in subsequent reviews. The Mac Namee Report (1971) noted that:

*“The GAA is concerned with all the people of Ireland, urban and rural. The problem... is that the Association is weakest where the population is increasing; it is strongest where the population is declining. That problem has always been there but the extent of the adverse trends in recent years has now brought a full realisation of its seriousness for the Association. It will take much planning, dedication and time to remedy the situation.” (Report of the Commission on the GAA, 1971: 11-12)*

However, even though the Association has been conscious of the need to address challenges arising from changing migratory patterns for the past 40 years, it has been difficult to effectively tackle the underlying issues. One of the primary reasons for this is the magnitude of the challenge combined with the fact that rural depopulation/urbanisation and the associated issues are so stratified in nature that they cannot be addressed by the GAA without close engagement with stakeholders such as the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

On this basis, success for the GAA will manifest itself in the development of a closer working relationship with expert planners at National and Local Government level to develop multi-faceted long-term strategies for resourcing and supporting the tradition of the GAA in areas

suffering from depopulation while also resourcing the development of the GAA in newly developed conurbations with no tradition of GAA and no current/limited GAA infrastructures in place.

The GAA also believes that there is an opportunity for the Association to work closely with stakeholders such as CCJ Ireland (Communities Creating Jobs) to assist communities achieve the target of 10 jobs per community, which is the primary objective of CCJ.



## General Observations regarding the NPF

### Ireland in 2040: A people-centred approach

The GAA welcomes the people-centred nature of the Consultation Papers and supports the suggestion that a core objective of the NPF should be to facilitate improvements to people's quality of life and well-being.

In order to deliver on this objective it is submitted that the NPF must reflect equality of opportunity i.e. through its policies and strategies the NPF should aim to provide equal opportunities for our citizen to live healthier, better and more fulfilling lives over the course of their entire lifetime regardless of where a person might reside.

It is submitted that, much as the GAA must now look at amending traditional rule rigidity to ensure that a player in a small Club in South Kerry and a player in a large conurbation such as Naas have an equal opportunity to participate and perform to the highest level of their own potential, the Government must look at ensuring that all policies and initiatives in the NPF are underpinned by the concept of equality of opportunity.

### Realising Potential of Place

The GAA welcomes the observations articulated in the 'Issues and Choices' Paper, which acknowledge that 'the authenticity and potential of places throughout Ireland are of immense value'. The GAA agrees with the comments that 'the variety of difference throughout Ireland' is 'one of our unique strengths' and a 'key asset built on a legacy of place-based cultural inheritance, which is so much part of us we might overlook it'.

The GAA firmly supports the idea that the NPF should seek to promote integrated place-based strategies for rural-urban hinterlands and that "these will build on the unique and distinctive assets of localities throughout Ireland in relation to food production, culture and heritage, landscape and tourism in the context of opportunities arising from new technologies and forms of clean-energy production".

The GAA has significant concerns about the threat to rural Clubs and research suggests that the possibility of the GAA losing over 30 Clubs in Leinster alone within the next 10 to 15 years. The creation of employment is critical to realising the potential of place and to reducing the development pressure on the East Coast. While opportunities for job creation range from food production to clean-energy, the Association believes that there is an opportunity for job creation in community development roles that might specifically incorporate the promotion and organisation of sport/leisure opportunities. This is something that could be pursued on a collaborative basis with partners such as Communities Creating Jobs and Connect Ireland by creating and supporting the roll-out of ten jobs in every rural community.

Furthermore, it is submitted that, much as one might overlook the legacy of a place-based cultural inheritance, it is highly probable that Irish people have underestimated the appeal of Gaelic games to tourists and the potential job creation opportunities arising from same. Gaelic games currently experiencing a golden age with displays of unrivalled skills and the introduction of a new global audience through the advent of GAAGO and broadcasting by Sky Sports. Furthermore, the level of global GAA activity is increasing on an annual basis across the Association's 8 International Units – Britain; North America; New York; Asia; Australasia; Canada; Europe; Middle East – as well as affiliated organisations in Argentina and South Africa. Therefore, through both the Irish Diaspora and international spectators who have discovered Gaelic games, the GAA has an unrivalled potential for collaboration with the Department in relation to Sports Tourism. Previous engagement such as The

Hurling Gathering in 2013 and the organisation of the second annual GAA World Games in Ireland during 2016 are testament to the Association's appeal and attraction to international visitors. In addition to this, the Association believes that Hurling has the potential to play a unique role in Irish Tourism. Over the last number of years, the Association has put significant resources into the possibility of obtaining heritage status for Hurling – both at national level and also at international level i.e. UNESCO World Heritage status. This would recognise that Hurling is integral to telling the story of Ireland, and serve showcasing its cultural values and ideals. There is an excellent opportunity to maximise upon an increased international audience and exposure and to integrate Hurling into Ireland's heritage tourism, which is worth approximately €1.5billion in total to the economy and directly supports 25,000 jobs (Economic Value of Ireland's Historic Environment: Final Report to the Heritage Council, 2011).

Aside from the creation of employment opportunities, the Association also welcomes the focus on trying to understand what can halt the population decline underway in rural areas and stem the internal migration towards already populated towns. In this regard, it is submitted that where projected populations are being allocated through the Core Strategies of the County Development Plans to, inter alia, rural areas and rural settlement clusters and villages that consideration be given to the adverse implications of imposing restrictions on population growth in these areas. These directly impact upon the viability of achieving the goal of establishing or consolidating a sustainable community in these localities. There are criteria in terms of the size of the local population and its age profile that have to be achieved if these communities and the community organisations serving them, such as the GAA Club, are to survive. To this end, consideration should be given to a relaxation of the controls on one-off housing in the countryside in areas where serious population decline or a demographic profile skewed towards the older age cohorts is endangering the survival of the community itself and organisations, such as the GAA Club, which are critical to their viability as sustainable communities. Consideration should be given to the formulation of meaningful incentive schemes to attract people to live in these communities.

In relation to the small rural cluster settlements and villages, the NPF should seek to incentivise settlement in these locations by allowing, for example, for the reduction and/or waiving of development contributions or other incentives which would promote residential development within them. A creative and innovative approach is required. A more flexible approach should be also adopted to the application of capping on the number of houses that may be built in these settlements and the smaller towns in the peripheral rural areas, where they may be perceived as disincentives to development.

The reckless speculative development that blighted so many smaller towns in the past must be avoided. A more flexible approach over a wider geographical area is a more creative way of dealing with this issue.

### Infrastructure: Priorities

Generally, the Association believes that a context-specific approach must be adopted to infrastructural development. This will ensure that infrastructure is developed in a meaningful manner that has regard for environmental concerns, planning laws and the need to rebalance the focus between Dublin and outlying regions.

In a sporting context, the GAA considers the provision of a full length floodlit artificial grass pitch in each County – located in the closest possible proximity to the largest centre of population – as an overriding infrastructural priority. The Irish climate does not allow for year-long outdoor activity but the provision of such facilities would go a long way to mitigating the

impact of the Irish weather. Aside from the requirement for a full-length floodlit artificial grass pitch, there is also a fundamental need to ensure equality of opportunity in relation to access to green spaces in general. The Consultation Papers make no apologies for previous errors in planning, which neglected and failed to acknowledge the importance of green spaces (parks, pitches etc.) in terms of the lifelong health and well-being of communities.

While some critics may question the level of existing capital funding provided to the GAA, the Association points to the fact that the funding is in reality an investment in the community. This is due to the fact that the GAA remains a unique vehicle for creating community cohesion – GAA facilities are uniquely used as a hub for a range of activities - games, dancing, community meetings, walking, social entrepreneurship etc.

However, the Association does not believe in adopting tunnel vision in this regard and the GAA has long advocated looking at working with other sports organisation or with Primary/Post Primary schools to see what can be developed in a multi-sport context.

### Implementation of the NPF: Consultation, Cooperation & Collaboration

In terms of implementation of the NPF, the GAA believes that the foundations of success lie firmly in the identification of a shared Vision that includes and engages a multitude of stakeholders and creates buy-in to a set of agreed principles and values.

Considering this, while the GAA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission, the document should be considered as an initial response to the Consultation Papers and the Association sincerely hopes that further chances to discuss the development of the NPF will be provided.

It is noted that the Action Plan for Rural Development outlines eight key deliverables, five pillars and associated objectives as well as a total of 276 actions. It is submitted that – further to consultation – it will be crucial to assign clear, time-specific tasks, roles and responsibilities to stakeholders such as the GAA. If this is not done there is a very real possibility that the lack of success will impact upon the attainment of the underlying objectives.

In recognising the sentiment of the old Irish seanfhocail – ní neart go cur le chéile - the GAA is committed to further cooperation and collaboration in the context of the NPF.

## Appendix I: Demographic Change – Impact and Response

### South Kerry

A report published in 2011, highlighted the challenge of rural depopulation in Kerry. It provided some startling findings:

- A 54% drop (over preceding 13 years) in the number of clubs that were able to field a minor team;
- In South Kerry, there are 9 clubs and none could field a minor team; in West Kerry An Ghaeltacht and Dingle just managed to field a 15 a-side.

The report found that there was very little hope for the future. In some of worst affected areas - Southern, Eastern and Northern peripheries 23 of the 76 clubs (34%) in the county have less than an average of 8 boys per class in their local Primary school.

It highlighted that the challenge is amplified by Government Policy, including the approach to infrastructure and investment. In addition, schools continue to be closed and more pupils are being bussed to central schools.

The report outlined changes to the way our games are run, such as amalgamations, timing of competitions, urban areas running street leagues; and clubs providing coaches for schools.

It also looked at how the GAA could work more proactively in those communities and in the County to help address the wider causes of rural de-population. It recommended the following:

- Job creation in the rural parts of the county to become a priority of the County Committee and to be included in its Development Plan. County Board to become active in lobbying for job creation and enterprise development;
- County Board, District Boards and all clubs to encourage GAA members to become members in Local development organizations in their local area so that GAA members are fully aware of what supports are available through the various agencies;
- Each club should look at appointing an enterprise/jobs officer to carry out this function;
- GAA to have a role in highlighting employment opportunities and in promoting support for Irish businesses and local business;
- Improve rural services and quality of life by promoting top quality GAA Activities;
- Develop links between the County board and employment agencies, government agencies; and
- Getting GAA members involved in local development groups/ organisations.

The Local Games Development Administrators (GDA) continue to monitor the participation levels in local areas.

A look at the updated position as of 2016 shows that the situation continues to worsen. The top two Clubs - Laune Rangers and Austin Stacks - have 512 registered players (male aged 8 – 18). The smallest 10 Clubs have 299 registered players (male aged 8 – 18) between them; the smallest Club – Valentia - has just 4 boys between the age of 8 and 18 registered.

In summary the largest two clubs have 512 boys registered while the smallest 10 clubs between them have only 299 registered.

- The top 11 Clubs have 2,105 registered players - 32%
- The next 21 clubs have 2,353 registered players - 35%
- The next 44 clubs have 2,223 registered players- 33%

These numbers are giving rise to major concerns that some of the Clubs in the third group will cease to exist in the near future.

## Kildare

Over a 20 year period (1991 to 2011) Kildare experienced a 71.5% increase in its population base. The more recent growth rate (2006 to 2011) of 12.9%, is the second highest in the state. This is explained by high levels of natural increase (birth rate) and a strong net migration.

Kildare has a geographically varied population density and as a county it is the 10th most densely populated county in the State with a density figure of 124.6 persons per square km. However, over 72% of the county's population live on 5% of the county's total land area, with the northeast of the county having by far the highest population densities. In 2015, 25% of the population was under 14; and 37% was under 25.

The Kildare County Committee of the GAA established a working group to examine these changes. In urban areas participation rates (among under 14s) were found to be lower in urban areas: 28% of children were active; while in rural areas participation was 48%. Various factors explain this but there is no doubting that a key issue was the pressure on mentors and the shortage of facilities in urban areas. In rural areas the opposite was the case with facilities in particular often being underutilised.

The response by the Working Group was to create a detailed process of engagement with all clubs to identify in detail the challenges and strengths in each local area.

The outcome of this process was a plan which was accepted by the County board and the clubs and supported by GAA's Central Council and Leinster Council. The plan involved:

- The creation of Demographic and Planning Committees for Local Areas (Local Area Development Regions --LADRS),
- Enhanced games programmes,
- Recruitment of additional full-time coaches (part funded by GAA and clubs),
- Investment in new facilities some of which are shared among clusters of clubs.

It is recognised that the development of the LADRs will assist Kildare GAA in dealing with the Local Authority and other stakeholders on a more focussed as "One Size Does Not Fit All ". Each LADRs is now developing a plan which will ensure all the communities in the region are covered by a long term sustainable club structure. It will also maximise the number of participating schools, nurseries and local participation initiatives and seek to provide adequate physical facilities to meet the current and future requirements of the region.

This process is an important insight into the question of how, at local level, an effective regional development can be brought about.