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Carlow County Council

1st October 2021

Re: Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028

To Whom it May Concern

This submission has been prepared by Swim Ireland, in response to the public notice seeking submissions on the Draft Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discourse from the view of a National Governing Body (NGB) of Sport.

OVERVIEW OF SWIM IRELAND

Swim Ireland is the National Governing Body (NGB) for Swimming, Water Polo, Diving and Synchronised Swimming across the 32 counties of Ireland, recognised as such by the Department of Sport through Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. Swim Ireland is also recognised at World level by [FINA](http://www.fina.org), and at European level by [LEN](http://www.len.eu).

With a membership of over 19,000 we have a network of 163 Clubs across every county in Ireland. Our remit as a Governing Body is to increase participation, run the competitive aspect of our sport and to provide a framework for regulation. Working in partnership with Local Sports Partnerships we are the delivery agents for the aquatic actions and strategic objectives set by the Irish Government in the National Physical Activity Plan and National Sports Policy, one of which is identified as to 'Get Ireland Swimming'.

Mass Participation is a key pillar of our [Strategic Plan 2017-2021](#) and one of our key strategic goals is simply to 'Get Ireland Swimming'.

We are the leading providers of accredited education to the leisure industry in Ireland. We work very closely with LSPs and other community partners to deliver programmes and can provide expert advice and guidance to facilities on how to maximise the use of pool time through efficient programming.

As a leading NGB we are well placed to contribute to this draft development plan.

President
Kevin Dowling

Board of Directors:
Chairman Peter Conway Treasurer Joan Hynes
Board Secretary Siorcha Ní Chléirigh
Directors, Helen Desmond, Gillian Markey, Jo McCormack, Aidan McLaughlin,
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SUBMISSION ON DRAFT CARLOW COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022-2028

Background

Swimming is an integral part of Irish society, its impact reaching beyond the sport itself. The Healthy Ireland (HI) Obesity Policy and Action Plan takes a life-course, evidence-based approach to tackling obesity and overweight and there is a strong body of research supporting the importance of swimming as a life-long activity.

We note that there is little reference to swimming or the provision of swimming pools in the Draft Plan and would suggest that consideration be made to its inclusion for reasons that we will set out within this submission. We advocate to continue our partnership with the local authority, pools, swimming, and water polo clubs in Carlow County.

We refer to the Carlow Sports Partnership Keep Active Physical Activity Programme, where Swim Ireland online resources are shared for the community to access. Now that COVID-19 restrictions are easing we hope to resume our programmes, and events in Carlow County and provide for the local communities.



Taking an evidence-based approach research consistently pointing to the importance of swimming. The National Physical Activity Plan, published in 2016, includes an action to develop **Get Ireland Swimming**, Cycling and Running initiatives. Furthermore, National Sports Policy (NSP), published in 2017, called for the prioritisation of swimming, cycling, and running, referencing that **these sports have the greatest potential for generating higher levels of active participation over the full life course** a fact that we believe warrants consideration in any development plan.

Swimming is also a fundamental life skill. Water Safety Ireland statistics show that there are an average of 120 drownings in Ireland every year. Drowning is the second leading cause of death in children in Ireland.



The most effective lifebuoy is an ability to swim. If there is not adequate provision of swimming pools children miss out on learning to swim at a vital stage in their development and are at a much higher risk of drowning.

We suggest, given the importance of swimming, that swimming pools be listed as one of the top leisure and recreational priority facilities. It should be noted that swimming is one of the few sports that is accessible by all ages, genders, and abilities, regardless of fitness levels or health status and as such the provision of facilities for swimming warrants specific consideration in the Development Plan.



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We strongly advocate for a partnership approach between the local authority, the Committee, swimming clubs and Swim Ireland. We have the following comments on the County Development

Objectives:

WQ. P4: Promote and support locally led community initiatives aimed at improving local water quality standards subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive.

We fully support this objective and would add that water testing at popular bathing areas should take place year-round and would also advocate for a review of the identified bathing waters within the County and to identify popular or 'High' status spots that are currently not being tested for water quality.

YP. P1: Support the work and role of community agencies, groups, and organisations, in the delivery of facilities and services in local communities for children and young people.

We would suggest that Swim Ireland be included as part of this network of organisations in the delivery of facilities. With a membership base of 19,000 members, we have experience in working with hard-to-reach groups. This includes running education courses, programmes, events and providing opportunities to be a part of the aquatic community in Ireland.

YP. P2: Consider the needs of children and young people, including those with disabilities and additional needs, in the provision of indoor and outdoor play and recreational facilities.

We would suggest that it is particularly important to consult with sporting bodies at the design phase and would suggest an amendment to provide for such consultation. Swim Ireland, for example, can provide advice on design elements which could impact on the longer-term use of swimming pools.

SL. P1: Facilitate a vibrant and active sports sector in the County with increased participation levels, good quality sustainable facilities, which are appropriate in scale and location, and which provide opportunities for people to have access to play an active role in sport and physical activities.

SL. P2: Support national sport policies and objectives, including collaboration with Sports Ireland, the County Carlow Local Sports Partnerships, clubs, communities, and partnerships within and beyond sport, to increase sport and physical activity participation levels.

SL. P3: Support local community and sports groups in developing sports facilities and to consider the development of such facilities at appropriate locations in the County. These facilities, if possible, should be clustered within other community facilities such as community centres and open spaces to create multi-user community hubs.

SL. P4: Ensure that the development of new sports facilities are designed to be universally accessible and accompanied by appropriate infrastructure including car parking, bicycle parking and changing rooms.

We suggest including National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport in this list. As the delivery agents of National Sports Policy, NGBs are a significant stakeholder and can add considerably to the discourse.



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SL. P5: Promote town and village centre sites for sports and leisure facilities, and to facilitate out of town/village sites where appropriate, (following a sequential test), in servicing large hinterland communities, where the site includes comprehensive off-road parking, conforms to all safety guidelines and is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

SL. O2: Seek to deliver a Water Hub Activity Centre in Carlow Town Park subject to the availability of financing and compliance with all planning and environmental criteria.

We suggest that reference to outdoor swimming be included here in recognition of the fact that it has become a year-round activity for many swimmers. The popularity of Open Water Swimming has increased substantially because of COVID-19, a trend that appears to be sustaining itself.

Changing shelters, notice boards for safety information and marker buoys are examples of things would add considerably to the development and safety aspect of the outdoor swimming. We also note that there is no reference to the development of outdoor swimming. The open-air pool in Bagenalstown is a great facility and we would hope that it will continue to be maintained and upgraded as necessary over the lifetime of the plan.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for this opportunity to contribute to the Development Plan and state that Swim Ireland is happy to engage further in any type of forum with the Council.

Kind Regards

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