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# Irish FA/ Department for Culture, Media & Sport Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 23-25

## Information & Guidance Notes



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## 1. Background

The Irish Football Association (Irish FA)/ Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund aims to allow grassroots football clubs, local authorities, schools and football-focused Sports Community/ Charitable organisations in Northern Ireland (NI) to improve and refurbish facilities so that grassroots football clubs and communities have a high-quality pitch to play on, thereby helping to create a better grassroots football infrastructure foundation.

Investment in creating the best possible grassroots football facilities enables young people to have the opportunity to reach their full potential in football, as well as providing the local community with access to facilities where they can participate in sport and become healthy and active. £2million of capital funding has been secured for the financial year 2023/24, with a further £3.59million of capital funding to be delivered in 2024/25.

In 2021/22 and 2022/23 the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund supported 54 small capital projects improving grassroots facilities throughout NI. From 2023-25 grassroots facilities capital funding will focus on delivering quality pitches and improving existing pitches that are not fit-for-purpose, as well as addressing the deficit in pitch supply throughout NI as highlighted in the pitch scoping report (link below) commissioned by DCMS.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-multi-sport-grassroots-facilities-programme-scoping-facilities-need-in-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland>

Funding applications for 2023/24 and 2024/25 will be opened in one application call. This is to commit funding and successfully deliver larger capital projects within the timeline available, over the next two financial years.

Successful projects must be completed by 31 March 2024 and/or 31 March 2025, subject to any phasing plan associated with your proposed scheme. Failure to complete the works in any phase year(s), as outlined in your application, by 31 March may result in the withdrawal of any award.

The Irish FA reserves the right to open a further application call for 2023/24 and/or 2024/25 if required.



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## 2. Priority Areas for Investment

Following the publication of a football needs assessment and pitch scoping report commissioned by DCMS, pitch supply priorities were identified for Northern Ireland. The report identified the need for investment into new and replacement artificial grass pitches (AGPs), improving the quality of existing natural grass pitches, creating new quality natural grass pitches, investing in amenities and secondary facilities that support pitches, and developing facilities that are accessible to all users and without access barriers.

Grants under the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund are for capital items only and are primarily to support grassroots activities in sport. Grassroots activities in sport are foundational, local-level, community-driven, and primarily recreational.

### Multi-sport

To ensure that as many people as possible from under-represented groups are able to access quality sports facilities to maximise sport and physical activity participation, **40% of the available investment** will be directed to multi-sport projects. **For the purposes of this investment programme, a multi-sport project is one that benefits football and at least one other sport on a sustained and regular basis.**

Multi-sport projects will continue to be football-led but will be expected to support football and provide community access to at least one other sport such as rugby, athletics, GAA, cricket, softball etc. The foregoing list is illustrative only and not exhaustive. Some sites may also support school curriculum PE activity, but multi-sport facilities will benefit the landscape of sport as a whole and create more opportunities for local communities to become involved in sport. Applicants are therefore encouraged to engage with other local clubs to support the multi-sport objectives of their application.

The following list details the priority objectives of the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund and it therefore follows that projects which meet multiple priority objectives will score more highly than projects which do not. However, applicants are reminded that they are not required to meet every priority objective listed in order to be considered eligible for funding:

- Improves the capital infrastructure to support the delivery of grassroots football activities across NI
- Increases participation in sport and physical activity across NI, improving mental and physical health of participants
- Increases the number of multi-sport facilities in Northern Ireland to boost participation in non-football sports
- Reduces the postcode lottery for quality facilities by directing investment to disadvantaged or areas of deprivation and boosts participation in these areas
- Delivers improved access to sport facilities for women and girls and other under-represented groups, to increase participation in these target groups
- Complements Government investment and sports development priorities include creating welcoming and inclusive, community facilities with football accessible to all, along with community partnerships that serve wider needs and provides facilities that can also be used for other activities



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- Demonstrates a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local 'partner' football club(s)<sup>1</sup>, which will subsequently become that facility's 'anchor' club(s) for significant football development activities, which supports increasing numbers of football players and teams at particularly youth/ grassroots levels and is actively engaged with the Irish FA across the key developmental areas as well as increasing participation amongst coaches, match officials and volunteers
- The project establishes pathways for young people to join/ progress into local football club activities and drives an increase in participation and opportunities
- There is a demonstrable and evidential need and demand for the project including local facility shortfall, long-term sustainability and identification of user groups. Examples include but are not limited to proposed pitch usage plans, local sports/ facility strategies, sports plans, technical studies, consultations, feasibility studies.

<sup>1</sup> A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a written undertaking must be established and evidenced to support a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local 'partner'/ 'anchor football club(s) and endorses significant grassroots football activities being hosted at the facility.

In order to direct at least 50% of investment to disadvantaged or areas of deprivation and boost participation in sport, applications from deprived areas will be prioritised based on a combination of the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 and Local Authority inactivity rankings.

Applications will be welcomed that bring a cross-community benefit and aim to improve and foster community integration in regard to cultural, ethnic or religious diversity.



### 3. Eligible Applicants

Applications are invited from the following organisations:

- Football clubs based in Northern Ireland that are affiliated to the Irish FA and participates in Northern Ireland leagues, including NIFL clubs and their associated entities<sup>1</sup>
- Local Authorities based in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>
- Association Football-focused Sports Community Organisations based in Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>
- Association Football-focused Charitable Organisations, that are registered with the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>.
- Schools/ Colleges/ Universities based in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Proposals from affiliated football clubs must demonstrate that they are engaged in community partnerships and the wider local community and have significant grassroots football activities. Football Clubs must also demonstrate that the facilities will be open, available for booking and accessible to sports clubs, leagues, local community and sports organisations during core training times including evening and weekend periods. The funding must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in Northern Ireland. Proposed usage plans for the facility must be provided as well as projected facility hire charges – charges should be reflective of current local/ regional market costs and demonstrate value for money. Refer to Annex 1 for illustrative template usage plan and proposed hourly charges. Both completed templates must be submitted with the application form.

<sup>2</sup> NI Local Authorities will be required to provide the corresponding Council minute confirming the approval of the proposed pitch project. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a written undertaking must be established to evidence a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local 'partner' football club(s) which will subsequently become that facility's 'anchor' club(s) for football development. The funding must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in Northern Ireland. Proposed usage plans for the facility must be provided as well as projected facility hire charges – charges should be reflective of current local/ regional market costs and demonstrate value for money. Refer to Annex 1 for illustrative template usage plan and proposed hourly charges. Both completed templates must be submitted with the application form.

<sup>3</sup> This will be determined by its organisational objectives/ charitable purpose within the organisation's Constitution and must be in line with overall Programme funding objectives. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a written undertaking must be established to evidence a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local 'partner' football club(s) which will subsequently become that facility's 'anchor' club for football development. These specific organisations must demonstrate that the facilities will be open, available for booking and accessible to sports clubs, leagues, local community and sports organisations during core training times including evening and weekend periods. The funding must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in Northern Ireland. Proposed usage plans for the facility must be provided as well as projected facility hire charges – charges should be reflective of current local/ regional market costs and demonstrate value for money. Refer to Annex 1 for illustrative template usage plan and proposed hourly charges. Both completed templates must be submitted with the application form.



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<sup>4</sup> A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a written undertaking must be established to evidence a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local 'partner' football club(s) which will subsequently become that facility's 'anchor' club(s) for football development. Proposals from schools, colleges and universities must demonstrate that the facilities will be open, available for booking and accessible to sports clubs, leagues, local community and sports organisations during core training times including evening and weekend periods i.e. outside of school hours. Proposed usage plans for the facility must be provided as well as projected facility hire charges – charges should be reflective of current local/ regional market costs and demonstrate value for money. Refer to Annex 1 for illustrative template usage plan and proposed hourly charges. Both completed templates must be submitted with the application form.

Applicants are reminded that funding applications are time-consuming, require significant related research and preparation, and of course come with no guarantee of success. Before you decide to proceed and complete your application, please read the guidance notes carefully to confirm that your project can meet the programme objectives.

The following organisations are **ineligible** to apply:

- Other Sports National Governing Bodies
- Other Sports Clubs i.e. Non-Association Football Clubs
- Individuals and Sole Traders.



## 4. What Projects and Items are Eligible for Funding

The funding must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in Northern Ireland. Capital assets means tangible infrastructure, permanent assets or fixtures and/ or upgrades/ improvements to the same.

Grassroots or community sport is considered to be non-professional play, which is local or community-based and sometimes dependent on volunteers. It is not necessarily competitive. It is accessible to the public and does not usually require a certain level of ability or skill to access.

### NIFL/ Professional Club Applicants

Pitch proposals can be delivered via a NIFL club<sup>1</sup> or professional club<sup>1</sup> however the applicant must clearly demonstrate how it will support affordable and accessible community sporting activities i.e., open to external grassroots/ community groups at key play times such as evenings and weekends. Professional club grassroots football activities are eligible. Examples include club youth academy teams (male and female), club disability team activities, club mini-soccer activities etc.

<sup>1</sup> For main stadium pitch projects only new or replacement artificial grass pitches (AGPs) will be considered as they support sustained play to include grassroots and community activities on the pitch. The 3G surface must be constructed and tested as a minimum to FIFA 'Quality' certification or the equivalent European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. **Where a higher level of play hosted at the target facility dictates the requirement, the surface must meet FIFA 'Quality Pro' certification on completion of the replacement project.**

AGPs will only be funded where either an existing, fully functioning floodlighting system is in place and can be retained, or where a new LED floodlighting system will be installed, as part of the overall project proposal.

### Eligible Items

The Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 2023-25 will be directed towards large capital projects primarily focusing on the installation of a quality natural grass pitches, certified artificial grass pitches (AGPs) or Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs). **All projects must have the development of a pitch at the core.** Project promoters must ensure that the funded pitch is kept secured and protected. Funding will support and be directed towards:

- The installation of a new, accessible natural grass pitch or replacement/ enhancement of an existing, accessible natural grass pitch. Associated pitch infrastructure including changing room facilities/ associated spaces<sup>3</sup>/ hubs, fencing/ gates, access/ egress around and leading up to the pitch, car parks to service pitches, dugouts/ goals (must remain on site) will be considered for funding in addition to the pitch installation. Bespoke pitch maintenance equipment will be considered for funding for both natural grass pitches and AGPs.
- The installation of a new, accessible artificial grass pitch (AGPs) or replacement of an



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existing, accessible artificial grass pitch<sup>1</sup>. Associated pitch infrastructure including floodlighting installations<sup>2</sup>, changing room facilities/ associated spaces<sup>3</sup>/ hubs, fencing/ gates, access/ egress around and leading up to the pitch, car parks to service pitches, dugouts/ goals (must remain on site) will be considered for funding in addition to the pitch installation. Bespoke pitch maintenance equipment will be considered for funding.

- The installation of a new, accessible small-sided Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)<sup>1</sup> that is suitable to host small-sided association football activities. This must be a MUGA with a 3G carpet and an infill product. **MUGAs must be designed to be a secure facility outside of defined, accessible hours if located within a public site.** Associated pitch infrastructure including floodlighting installations<sup>2</sup>, changing room facilities/ associated spaces<sup>3</sup>/ hubs, fencing/ gates, access/ egress around and leading up to the pitch, car parks to service pitches, dugouts/ goals (must remain on site) will be considered for funding in addition to the MUGA installation.

<sup>1</sup> Artificial grass pitches (AGPs) and small-sided Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) will only be funded **where either an existing, fully functioning floodlighting system is already in place and can be retained, or where a new LED floodlighting system will be installed**, as part of the overall project proposal.

For all 3G pitch replacement applications, the 3G pitch **must be in evidencable need of replacement and be at least 7 years old**. The replacement surface must be constructed and tested as a minimum to FIFA 'Quality' certification or the equivalent European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. Where a higher level of play hosted at the target facility dictates the requirement, the surface must meet FIFA 'Quality Pro' certification on completion of the replacement project.

For all new build 3G pitch applications, the 3G surface must meet FIFA 'Quality' certification or the Equivalent European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. Where a higher level of play hosted at the target facility dictates the requirement, the surface must meet FIFA 'Quality Pro' certification on completion of the replacement project.

In addition, the installation of low-level containment barriers around the spectator perimeter fencing, gratings at pitch entry/ exit points and boot cleaning stations are strongly encouraged as risk management measures to mitigate against the impact of microplastic migration from pitch infill into drainage systems and local water courses (please refer to section 9, Environmental Considerations for further detail).

<sup>2</sup> Funding will only be awarded for new or upgraded, fixed, LED floodlighting installations on artificial grass pitches or artificial MUGAs to increase playing time, provide access and availability during evenings/ Winter periods and promote the use of sustainable energy. Funding will not be awarded for floodlighting installations associated with natural grass pitches.

<sup>3</sup> Associated spaces/ hubs may be funded in addition to changing room provision but will not be prioritised as a standalone element ahead of changing facilities. Changing room pavilions will support the use of pitches, improve stakeholder experience, service the needs of the local community, leagues and clubs, and promote the use of sustainable energy.



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Changing facilities must be designed for and accessed by male players, female players and those with disabilities. The aspiration should be to achieve equal access for all existing and potential users and therefore a minimum standard as per NI Building Regs Technical Booklet R, BS8300:1:2018 and BS8300:2:2018 should be achieved.

### Professional fees

Professional fees can be considered as eligible project expenditure, but only where such fees are directly associated with the planning and/or delivery of a successful project. Example fees include an industry-accredited pitch consultant, specialist testing consultant, architect, quantity surveyor, engineers, solicitor's fees and services connected to the project e.g. building control.

Professional fees must be reasonable, offer value in line with market costs and may be subject to review by an independent cost consultant, along with project capital costs. Further assurance of costs and plans in the areas listed may be conducted by the IFA and/or DCMS.

Design competitions and feasibility studies/ speculative investigatory costs to analyse project viability are not considered as eligible project expenditure. Applicants may therefore need to ascertain the suitability of their proposed project site by carrying out ground surveys to determine ground condition suitability at their own cost.

Similarly, applicants must take pitch drainage into account and consult with the relevant local planning body in respect of drainage considerations as drainage design will normally form part of the pitch design criteria necessary to obtain the planning consent required at time of application.

### Project Development

Applications must clearly demonstrate a vision and business plan for the project and its long-term objectives. The defined programme criteria and objectives must be at the core of any project proposal and are reflected in the project outcomes.

All project proposals should clearly demonstrate clear, measurable impact outcomes detailing who will benefit from the project and how and when the benefits will be achieved.

An applicant should develop its pitch project design with a design team, architect and/ or industry recognised pitch consultant.

Successful applicants will be required to appoint a specialist project team to oversee all elements of the project to include planning, design, procurement and overall management of the project from initiation, through the main construction phase and on to full completion.

Individuals/ contractors responsible for the design and delivery of the pitch proposal must be industry recognised, have experience in delivering certified pitches and hold recognised accreditations/ qualifications associated with the delivery of pitch projects.

The above will be further reflected as conditions of any Letter of Offer.



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Recognised accreditations/ qualifications can include but are not exclusive to memberships of/ affiliation to bodies such as SAPCA or the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf. For the construction of associated infrastructure/ facilities contractors must hold the appropriate Health and Safety and professional certifications.

### Project Considerations

**You may only submit one application, for one project proposal, at any one location. However, organisations that hold responsibility for multiple sites, may submit applications for different sites.** A project proposal may consist of more than one component e.g., pitch and changing rooms and this should be submitted as one application.

When considering its project design proposal, applicants may wish to access best practice synthetic turf sports pitch/ MUGA design guidance via the Sports and Play Construction Association's (SAPCA) website (<https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>).



## 5. What Items are not Eligible for Funding

- Replacement of like-for-like existing facilities (distinct from upgrades)
- Covered spectator stands
- Spectator toilet blocks
- Turnstiles
- Portable floodlighting systems
- Storage facilities/ storage containers
- Resource costs e.g., employee salaries
- Non-capital related costs incurred pre award of Letter of Offer includes but is not limited to feasibility studies, consultancy fees associated with the 'working up' or development of projects
- Running costs including electricity, gas, rates, rent, pitch hire associated match costs
- Temporary sports equipment items such as balls, bibs, cones, hoops, hurdles, football kit etc
- Lawnmowers or grass maintenance equipment designed for domestic use
- Improvements and upgrades to bar areas and social clubs
- Other sporting equipment e.g., equipment for changing rooms/ club house such as table, chairs, bar furniture
- IT equipment e.g., laptops, servers, printers, computer hardware, mobile phones, tracking equipment, other information technology related equipment
- Projects that have already commenced



## 6. Project State of Readiness

### Security of Tenure

Applicants must provide evidence that they either own (Title Deeds) or lease the project site and at the time of application have a minimum of 10 years validity on the lease.

### Planning Permission/ Statutory Approvals

Given the challenging timescales associated with funding distribution and the subsequent completion of the resultant project, at the time of application either full planning permission must have been granted or, as a minimum, outline planning permission is in place. Planning consent must be granted by the time the assessment panel convenes to make their decisions in respect to the allocation of all programme funding for 2023-25, otherwise the application will be deemed ineligible. New 3G pitch projects require planning approval, detailed design, business planning and procurement.

It will be a condition of the Letter of Offer that all applicable statutory approvals are granted for the project. Applicants must confirm with their local authority whether the proposed works require approval in terms of planning control, building control or other statutory obligations. Advice on project design standards can be obtained from project design teams, architects and/or pitch consultants.

### Partner and club funding contributions (Match funding)

Confirmed partner and/ or club funding contributions must be evidenced e.g. bank statements, Letters of Offer, funding agreements.

Unconfirmed partner and/or club funding contributions such as grant funding applications that have been made (and are awaiting a decision) or other fund raising, which will be intended for use alongside the grant request made to the IFA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund, must be detailed within any application. Letters of Comfort/ Letters of Intent will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Detail of partner funding (both confirmed and unconfirmed) must be provided at the time of application, otherwise the application will be deemed ineligible.

If any partner funding detailed (both confirmed and unconfirmed) at time of application is not subsequently made available to the specified level, then any Letter of Offer issued may be rescinded.

### Project Costs and Phasing

Applicants should have fully worked up total project budgets with up-to-date costings and a project timeline for completion, including key project milestones. For larger value projects, the phasing of capital works will be considered, i.e., a project can take place over both financial years as long as the applicant can demonstrate how spend will be delivered in each financial year (1 April – 31 March).



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**For the avoidance of doubt, approved projects or a distinct phase/ element of the overall approved capital works programme, must complete by no later than 31 March in the financial year in which the approved project or distinct phase/ element of a phased project is funded, as detailed in the Letter of Offer. If a phased project approach is being considered, the pitch installation must be the first phase of the approved project.**

Please refer to Annex 2 and Annexe 3 to provide:

- detailed project costs (applicants must provide up to date project costings based on the receipt of more than one quotation). The completed template must be submitted with the application form and applicants are encouraged to evidence what cost assurance has already been conducted e.g. by testing the costing with an external consultant.
- confirmation as to when funding for the project or project phases will be drawn down. The completed template must be submitted with the application form.

Where project costs increase, the Irish FA will not increase the grant award. Where project costs are less than the projected total project cost, the Irish FA grant will be reduced by the corresponding amount with the applicant contribution expected to remain as approved by the Advisory Panel and detailed in the Letter of Offer.



## 7. Funding Thresholds

**The minimum award available is £100,000 with a maximum award of up to £400,000.**

Applicants should note that the minimum grant award for all projects is £100,000 therefore the minimum total project value will need to exceed £100,000 i.e., at least the minimum funding award from this funding programme plus partner funding contributions.

There is a minimum match funding expectation of 40%<sup>1</sup> for Local Authorities and Schools/ Colleges/ Universities based in NI. For all other applicants there is a minimum 10% match funding expectation<sup>1</sup>.

The application process will be competitive and priority scoring will be given to higher levels of match funding whilst lower percentages, including below the minimum expectation, will be considered in the context of the strength of the overall application.

<sup>1</sup> Match funding contributions include cash in the bank, a loan or offer of funding from another source. Evidence includes either confirmation of a bank loan, bank statements or Letter of Offer or Letter of Comfort/ Letter of Intent from another funder.

**Confirmed evidence of match funding must be provided by the applicant prior to the commitment of any funding.**

The funding award must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in NI. Capital assets means tangible infrastructure, permanent assets, or fixtures and/ or upgrades/ improvements to the same.

Retrospective funding towards the cost of projects which have been started prior to an application being made, an application being determined or approval being given to proceed is not permitted and will not be awarded i.e., costs incurred before the agreement to the Terms of Conditions of the Letter of Offer.

If your organisation is not registered for VAT or is not in a position to have the project zero-rated for VAT purposes, VAT costs must be included in the project costs. If your organisation is registered for VAT, VAT costs will not be eligible.

It is strictly forbidden for all applicants to seek funding which is for the same purpose as funding already awarded/ secured from another third-party grants body.



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## 8. Pitch Certification/ Sustainability

All successful applicants must appoint a capital project manager/ accredited pitch consultant who will assist with the design, specification, management and delivery of the project. Any design and technical plans will be reviewed by the Irish FA or its appointees. Applicants must ensure that adequate insurance cover (public and employer's liability and all risks insurance) is taken out and maintained during the course of the building contract.

A specialist pitch testing consultant must also be appointed who is responsible for overseeing the testing and certification of the 3G AGP. AGPs should be constructed and tested **as a minimum** to the FIFA 'Quality' Standard as part of the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf (FIFA Quality certification is required every three years) **or** the equivalent European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. Some applicants may require the pitch to hold dual certification to both FIFA Quality and FIFA Quality Pro standards and this should be considered when designing and installing the 3G carpet. The pitch must hold a FIFA Quality standard at all times.

Refer to the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf Test Manual II – Test Requirements, October 2015 for all FIFA 3G AGP testing standards and requirements.

<https://www.fifa.com/technical/football-technology/standards/football-turf/fifa-quality-programme-for-football-turf>

MUGAs/ small-sided pitches will be considered with 3G surfaces with infill products and should be constructed and tested to the European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. MUGAs/ small-sided 3G pitches must be designed to support grassroots association football activities.

All pitch projects must include a 12-month defects period and applicable supplier product/ performance warranties. Applicants should seek advice from the manufacturer.

All pitch projects must demonstrate and evidence the future long-term sustainability of the surface including the confirmation of maintenance schedules/ contracts, topping up of infill products (relevant to AGP projects, noting the potential ban on the use of microplastic infill products) and 'sinking fund' proposals.

All project promoters should appoint a reputable and suitably qualified contractor following the completion of the defects liability period, to ensure ongoing maintenance of the funded asset. The project promoter should undertake a programme of maintenance and repair to safeguard the asset and will replace or renew the facility when it becomes necessary through the establishment of a pitch 'sinking fund'.

When considering pitch maintenance, applicants may wish to access best practice for the construction and maintenance of a synthetic turf sports pitch/ MUGA via the Sports and Play Construction Association's (SAPCA) website:

<https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>



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## 9. Environmental Considerations

Applicants should consider when developing their project proposal how they can demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding the environment through minimising environmental impacts and adopting practices that promote environmental sustainability including:

LED floodlighting installations – for AGP/ MUGA pitch installations only, applicants may wish to consider the installation of a new or upgraded floodlighting system with LED lights. As well as having an increased life span, LED floodlighting systems are energy and cost efficient and environmentally friendly.

Recycling – for existing 3G AGPs, applicants may wish to consider the different elements of pitch construction which may be suitable for recycling (detailed below) or determine if the resurfacing of existing sand-based or macadam surfaces such as 3G AGPs is feasible.

- shock-pad(s) – if an existing shock pad is proposed to be retained it should be tested prior to seeking tenders or quotations to determine its exact properties and suitability for re-use.
- infill products.
- 3G AGP repurposed at another site (subject to condition).

Microplastic infills – for new or replacement 3G AGP surfaces to consider the use of an alternative bio or eco-friendly infill (e.g. cork) to rubber-based infill products (e.g. SBR, EPDM, ELT etc).

Project applicants must note that the European Commission (EC) has accepted the proposal of ECHA (the European Chemicals Agency) which recommends introducing a ban on the use of microplastics infills used in 3G AGP systems. The proposed regulation would imply a ban on the use of microplastics and would be a legal requirement in all EU member countries.

This proposal is currently being debated and discussed in Parliament. If a ban were agreed and enforced, a transition period of six years would become effective from the date when the recommendation becomes legislation. In the meantime, it is possible to continue to install 3G AGPs with microplastic infills, and it will be possible for the duration of the six-year transition period. At the end of the transition period, it will not be possible to install a synthetic turf field with microplastic infills, nor will it be possible to supply additional microplastic infill materials for future top-ups on fields.

Infill Risk Management Measures – introducing measures and practices that minimise the risk of microplastic migration into drainage systems and local water courses including not overfilling the pitch to prevent excessive levels of infill, ensuring that infill products are stored in secure locations, ensuring that infill installation equipment and carpet brushes are thoroughly cleaned before leaving the pitch, installing low-level containment barriers around the spectator perimeter fencing and boot cleaning stations for boots post-match.

## 10. Irish FA Ground Criteria Requirements

For proposed projects at venues that host Intermediate standard football and above, applicants must ensure that all funded items such as pitches (including markings), floodlighting, fencing, gates, dugouts, changing rooms etc. must comply with the relevant Irish FA ground criteria requirements.

Refer to the Irish FA's Joint Ground Criteria document (November 2019):

<https://www.irishfa.com/media/41546/ifa-joint-ground-criteria-nov-2019.pdf>.

Pitch dimensions, markings and runoff areas must comply with the relevant infrastructure requirements. Please contact the Irish FA to discuss infrastructure requirements, if required.



## 11. Application Process/ Assessment of Funding Applications

### How do I apply?

Applications for the 2023-25 Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Investment Fund will open on 6 April 2023. Applications will be open for four weeks. It is anticipated that the application assessment process will take place during May-June 2023. Applicants will apply for funding via a dedicated online application system (<https://ecv.microsoft.com/EiQMMOuWdW>).

All potential applicants will be asked to register using their contact email address and will be issued with log in credentials to access the application. An electronic link to submit any required supporting documentation will also be provided. The application registration email and log in details must be saved to be able to access the application form. Applicants may request a copy of their application form for their own records and reference.

Applicants will be required to confirm within the application form that the information provided is truthful and accurate and the primary contact has the permission to apply on behalf of the applicant.

### When is the application deadline?

This phase of the Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund will accept online applications until:

**12 noon on Thursday 4 May 2023**

### Application Assessment Process

All applications will be assessed by an external third-party assessor (Co-operation Ireland) who will assess applications against the funding criteria as detailed in the funding guidelines. Co-operation Ireland will act as the assessment and delivery partner for this programme.

Only those projects that pass an initial eligibility sift will be assessed and subsequently considered by the programme advisory panel.

Eligible applications will be scored using a scoring criteria (refer to Annex 4) and ranked on merit but priority will be given to those projects that deliver the greatest impact against the stipulated objectives (e.g., how the project meets funding objectives, evidence of need, deprivation ranking, targeted users, confirmation of project completion date etc.). Funding will be allocated based on application ranking. The third-party assessor will make recommendations which will be presented to an Advisory Panel comprised of representatives of the Irish FA, Sport NI and DCMS who will approve awards for grant aid.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate within their application how the proposed project meets the funding objectives, provide evidence of need and demand, confirm project's 'state of readiness' to proceed, provide project timeline for completion detailing key project milestones, provide all supporting documentation and establish project targets associated with post-project monitoring. Applicants should also ensure user and manager surveys are pushed out



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to projects a month after completion to support effective monitoring and evaluation of the wider programme.

Applications are particularly welcome from groups that have not previously been awarded Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities funding.

#### Application Queries/ Clarification Requests

The Irish FA will record and publish all relevant clarifications submitted by potential applicants via a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) log on the Irish FA's website:

<https://www.irishfa.com/irish-football-association/irish-fa-dcms-grassroots-facilities-investment-fund>.

The FAQ log will be updated as clarifications are sought by potential applicants. All clarification requests should be forwarded via the dedicated funding email address [dcms.funding@irishfa.com](mailto:dcms.funding@irishfa.com).

The Irish FA requires applicants to provide whatever information may be necessary to safeguard public funds. You should therefore ensure that the details that you provide are correct. Any misleading statements (whether deliberate or accidental) given at any stage may render your application invalid, and you may be liable to return any money paid out.

#### Indicative Application Timeline

The application timeline for the 23-25 Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund is as follows:

Action	Date
Applications open	6 April 2023
Applications close	Noon on 4 May 2023
Application appraisal/ assessment period	May – June 2023
Letter of Offer issued to successful applicants	July 2023
Projects completed and grant aid claims submitted for payment following a verification site visit by the Irish FA	Project claim submission deadline stipulated in Letter of Offer
Collection of annual user surveys	Ongoing, 1 month after project completion and then annually



## 12. Successful Applications/ Project Delivery

Successful applicants will be issued a Letter of Offer with funding Terms and Conditions and will be required to sign the Letter of Offer before commencing the capital works procurement process. Items awarded grant aid should not be purchased in advance of written confirmation i.e., in advance of the issuance and signing of a Letter of Offer, as retrospective funding is not permitted. Successful applicants can appoint a design team in order to seek Statutory Approvals and be in a project 'state of readiness'. However, the process to appoint a contractor to undertake the capital works must not be initiated prior to the issuance of a Letter of Offer. Design team fees incurred pre receipt of a Letter of Offer cannot be recouped or funded.

Only eligible items listed in the Letter of Offer can be funded. If issues arise during the project and there is a potential deviation from the original Letter of Offer, project promoters must contact Co-operation Ireland or the Irish FA to seek advice and be granted approval in advance of any changes to the original agreement. Items not listed on the Letter of Offer, will be deemed ineligible for funding.

The Irish FA reserves the right to allocate individual project spend into each of the two financial years based on the project type and the project's ability to deliver within the set timescales and financial year end.

The project procurement process must be verified, agreed with and signed off by Co-operation Ireland before contractors are appointed to commence capital works. This includes the review of all tender and any relevant procurement documentation.

Once applicants have completed the procurement of goods and services and the proposed project has been completed and delivered in full, the project promoter must contact the Irish FA with reasonable notice to carry out a visual check via a verification site visit, before the final grant claim is processed for payment.

Project completion dates are clearly detailed within the Letter of Offer and must complete within the applicable financial year end. Failure to adhere to the project completion date may result in the project being deemed ineligible for funding.

All project grant aid claims must be submitted by the claim submission deadline date as stipulated in the Letter of Offer. Claims for payment received after the deadline date stipulated will not be accepted and the expenditure incurred is deemed ineligible for grant aid.

### 13. Unsuccessful Applications

There is no entitlement to an award. Your application will be in competition with others for a finite pot of funding. If more applications for awards are received than available funds, it is inevitable that even good quality projects will be unsuccessful because they compare less favourably than others against the established criteria. It is possible that some projects meet all the criteria and cannot be funded due to oversubscription. In the scenario where two projects score the same and cannot be differentiated, the award may be determined via a process of random selection.

Low quality projects that have a minimum impact in terms of the core Programme objectives and targets/ outputs may not be awarded funding as they may score below a funding threshold. This will be determined by and is at the discretion of the Programme's Advisory Panel. There may be an instance where there are not enough quality projects to commit all available monies. It will be the discretion of the decision-making panel as to where and when uncommitted monies are reallocated.

The Irish FA reserves the right to reject any incomplete or incorrectly completed application forms that prevent a full assessment. Failure to forward requested documentation could result in the application being deemed incomplete.

The advisory panel reserve the right to hold a reserve list of projects should funding become available. The panel will make applicants aware that they are fundable declines and should further funding become available from this tranche of funding they will be considered.

There is no appeals process for the Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund. Application feedback is available to all unsuccessful applicants. A formal request for feedback should be sent to [dcmsfunding@cooperationireland.org](mailto:dcmsfunding@cooperationireland.org).

### 14. Irish Football Association Privacy Notice

All data will be processed and collected in line with the Irish Football Association Privacy Notice: <https://www.irishfa.com/privacy>.

### 15. Annexes

## Annex 1 Illustrative Facility Usage Plan for an AGP:

<u>Sample Usage Plan</u>	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Time/ Day							
08:00-09:00					Pitch Maintenance		
09:00-10:00	Pitch Maintenance	Seniors Walking Football		Seniors Walking Football		Anchor Club FC Small Sided Games	Go-Games GAA Matches
10:00-11:00	Belfast Primary School P.E.		Belfast Primary School P.E.			IFA Small Sided Games	Go-Games GAA Matches
11:00-12:00						U19 Anchor Club FC Academy Match	
12:00-13:00					School Football Match	U19 Anchor Club FC Academy Match	Mini Rugby tournament
13:00-14:00	School Football match				School Football Match		Mini Rugby Tournament
14:00-15:00	School Football Match					Senior Mens Team match	Disability Team Training
15:00- 16:00			Multi-Sport After Schools Club			Senior Mens Team match	Disability Team Training
16:00- 17:00						Senior Mens Team match	Recreational 5-aside

17:00- 18:00	Grassroots FC Underage training				Youth Club Multi Sports session		
18:00-19:00	Community FC U14 Boys Team Training	Touch Rugby training	Grassroots FC Underage training	Anchor Club FC Team Training	Anchor club Women's senior match		Recreational Softball game
19:00-20:00	Anchor Club FC Team Training	Anchor Club FC Girls Team Training	Community FC Girls Team Training	Grassroots FC Underage training	Anchor club Women's Senior match		
20:00-21:00	Anchor Club FC Team Training	Community FC Team Training	GAA Team Training	Recreational 5-aside	Recreational 5-aside		
21:00-22:00	Recreational 5-aside				Recreational 5-aside		





## Illustrative Proposed Facility Charge Template

<u>Proposed Peak Time</u>	<u>Proposed Off Peak Time/ Concession rate</u>	<u>11-a-side Match Rate</u>
<b>Charge Per <u>Hour</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full pitch</li> <li>● Half Pitch</li> <li>● 1/3 pitch</li> </ul>	<b>Charge Per <u>Hour</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full pitch</li> <li>● Half Pitch</li> <li>● 1/3 pitch</li> </ul>	<b>Charge per <u>2 hours</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full Pitch</li> </ul>
£	£	£
£	£	£
£	£	£

### Additional Charges for Floodlighting/ Changing Rooms & Showering if not inclusive of above hire costs

- Floodlighting
- Changing Rooms and showering

£

£



## Annex 3

### Proposed Timeline for Drawdown of Funding

Item of Expenditure	Net cost	Vat	Total Costs	Grant requested	Expenditure in 2023/24 Financial year (£)	Expenditure in 2024/25 Financial year (£)

## Annex 4

### Response Scoring

Poor response to the question	Acceptable response to the question	Excellent response to the question
<p><b>The applicant has provided a poor response to all the following factors -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Evidence of need</li> <li>•the request is relevant to the stated needs.</li> <li>•details SMART outcomes arising relating to the objective.</li> <li>•relates this need to other community/ strategic plans.</li> <li>•Has provided evidence of capacity to deliver the objective.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The applicant has provided an acceptable response to all the following factors -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Evidence of need</li> <li>•the request is relevant to the stated needs.</li> <li>•details SMART outcomes arising relating to the objective.</li> <li>•relates this need to other community/ strategic plans.</li> <li>•Has provided evidence of capacity to deliver the objective.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The applicant has provided an excellent response to all the following elements -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Evidence of need</li> <li>•the request is relevant to the stated needs.</li> <li>•details SMART outcomes arising relating to the objective.</li> <li>•relates this need to other community/ strategic plans.</li> <li>•Has provided evidence of capacity to deliver the objective.</li> </ul>



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