

## **'Growing the Game and Raising Standards'**

### **Welsh Football's 'Building Better Facilities for the Future' Vision**

#### **Introduction**

The Welsh Football Trust is embarking on an exciting new phase in its strategy for the development of the game. 'Growing the Game and Raising Standards' is the Trust's Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2014. The Plan highlights how the generally poor standard of grass roots facilities and playing surfaces in Wales could inhibit the planned potential growth of the game.

Working in partnership with Sport Wales and the FAW, the Trust is seeking to collaborate with local authorities, educational establishments and football clubs to stimulate the development of inspiring and 'fit for the future' facilities, providing improved playing surfaces to meet our objectives of developing more and better players.

#### ***Our Vision***

The rationale for the Welsh Football 'Better Facilities' vision is ambitious and includes:-

- improving Academy facilities that help develop talented players to progress in the performance pathway;
- improving Football facilities to increase their capacity to support greater use by more teams or clubs;
- Facilities that can support more mini football - for age groups ranging from under 7's to under 11's, feeding into junior football;
- Facilities that can support informal and small sided recreational leagues, catering for 'lifelong' adult participation;
- Facilities to support improved junior football standards, as well as increasing and maintaining participation;
- Facilities to better integrate junior and senior football;
- Where appropriate club facilities used to serve the wider community – as alternative learning centres or for other sporting needs.

These aspirations will demand more playing facilities that can support increase football use all year round.

This 'vision has been developed within the context of the FAW Strategic Plan and revised Welsh Football Trust Strategy for 2010 - 2014.

#### **Why invest in better football facilities for Football?**

In the context of participation, football is the most popular sport in Wales. There are:-

- 50,000 registered senior males;
- 1,000 registered senior females;
- 7 senior leagues directly affiliated to the FAW with 117 clubs;
- 18 clubs with academies – each with 4 age groups between under 11 to 18;

- 5 Welsh clubs in the English football pyramid providing players with higher level training and competition;
- 40 senior recreational leagues with approximately 600 teams.

In junior football there are:-

- 39,715 registered boys;
- 526 accredited junior clubs;
- 32 junior leagues;
- 3,554 registered girl players;
- 211 girls teams;
- 15 girls leagues;
- 624 accredited primary schools.

Through coaching and learning through football there are:-

- 10,000 active registered coaches - 4,000 training opportunities for coaches and volunteers are delivered each year.

Football is a powerful tool for improving physical activity, community health, social inclusion and educational attainment. It has the ability to engage and transcend divisions in our society and embrace the diverse communities of Wales in a manner that no other sport can. Its status is highlighted by the massive media profile that it enjoys, whilst statistics for participation prove it to be more popular than any other sport in Wales.

Football can make a significant contribution to learning and skill building, leading to volunteering and employment opportunities. The motivational 'hook' of football can be used as a learning medium to inspire young people to develop their education and skills for employment and active citizenship through volunteering.

Despite its strengths, the further development of the game is stifled by:-

- most 'senior' clubs being relatively small;
- many clubs having 'tired' and outdated facilities;
- a disconnect between senior and junior clubs, limiting player development future membership and financial stability;
- too few opportunities for recreational football and lifelong participation;
- playing surfaces not supporting participation growth through new markets including women and girls, or serving to satisfy long term participation by adults;
- existing facilities being unable to withstand inclement weather resulting in fixture postponements, income loss and disappointed players - particularly juniors.

**At the heart of Welsh football's 'Better Facilities' vision is an aspiration to encourage the development of more 3G pitches that would provide '24/7' training and playing opportunities. This is essential if increased participation and coaching and playing standards are to be achieved throughout the Welsh Pyramid.**

### **The Case for More 3G pitches**

There are more than 150 ATPs (mainly sand based) in Wales, of which about 100 are full sized. The majority were built through lottery funding over the last 20 years. Many are nearing the end of their beneficial life and are in need of replacement during the next 5 years. Hockey provision was the original 'driver' for their development and at the time a proposal for football use was

not in place. Hockey did not previously permit 3G pitches to be used for competition at any level. The specifications for artificial surfaces have advanced significantly and the demands for football and hockey have changed. There is now a strong case for 3G pitch developments serving football training and playing. Hockey requires better artificial carpets too.

More than 60 ATPs in Wales are presently not used by a hockey club or recognised as fit for purpose by the Welsh Hockey Union. Despite this, local authorities and educational establishments are continuing to replace existing ATPs with like for like facilities, possibly unaware of other sporting demands and potential benefits that could be realised if they were to replace the carpets with a different surface.

The Welsh Hockey Union recognises that 3G pitches are preferable to poorly maintained grass or synthetic turf pitches. It also acknowledges that with appropriate maintenance, 3G turf is appropriate for introductory hockey in schools and clubs. Hockey playing surface needs vary at different playing levels from water based and sand dressed carpets at the highest level, to sand filled/sand based surfaces and appropriate 3G carpets at school and community level.

A new full size 3 G pitch would cost in the region of £650,000 per location, representing a significant ongoing capital liability beyond the reach of most football clubs. However, there is potential for Welsh football to work in partnership with local authorities and educational establishments to encourage the replacement of sand filled ATPs with more suitable 3G surfaces that would attract and support increased football participation, training and competition. As well as developing better facilities for football and hockey that would deliver a much greater impact, this approach would also help identify opportunities to rationalise and upgrade existing provision, potentially releasing some natural and artificial turf pitches for other uses.

## **FACILITY MODELS**

### **Development Aims**

To achieve the ‘growing the game – raising standards’ aspirations and potential of football in Wales building on the development of more inspirational, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities as a catalyst for improvement and growth.

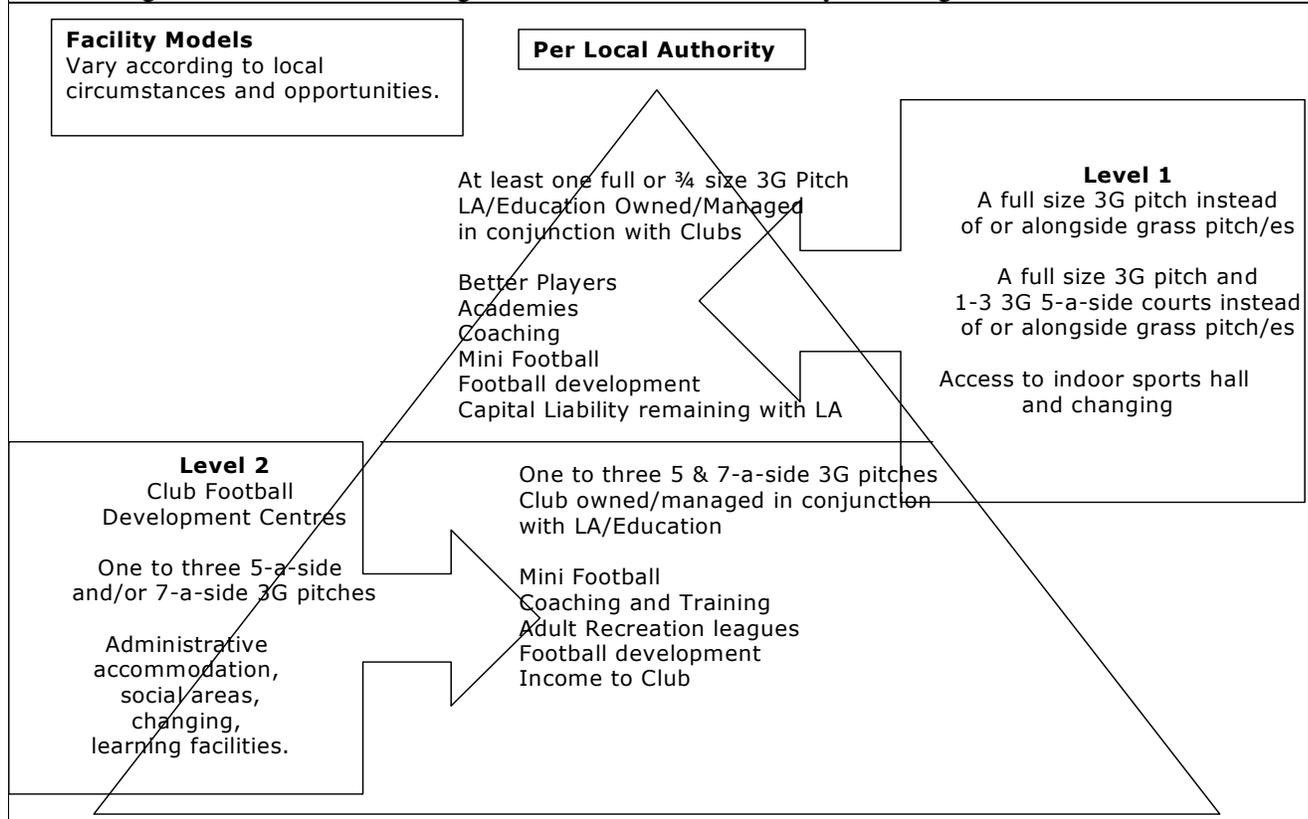
### **Facility Models**

Model templates for each facility development will vary according to local circumstances and opportunities. They might include new or upgraded facilities with appropriate support accommodation and possibly developed in conjunction with a study/community learning centres  
e.g.:

High quality natural grass pitches and 3G pitches with floodlights for training and competition  
e.g.:

- A full size 3 G pitch instead of/or alongside a grass pitch(es);
- A full size 3 G pitch and 1-3 3G 5-a-side courts instead of/or alongside a grass pitch(es);

- 1-3 5-a-side and 7-a-side 3G pitches alongside a grass pitch(es);
- 1-3 5-a-side and/or 7-a-side 3G pitches;
- Access to an indoor sports hall for training;
- Administrative accommodation;
- Social Areas;
- Changing, essential to the playing of the game;
- Learning facilities – for coaching and ‘alternative community learning centres’.



## POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

The development of improved local facilities through partnerships with clubs, local authorities and educational establishments will be key to enabling football achieve its potential growth and targets. Despite the difficult financial climate, development opportunities do exist and significant capital investment in ATPs continues across Wales. However it is even more important to ensure funding - achieves more benefits - is more flexible in order to deliver wider agendas - secures better value for money - thus maximising the impact of the limited funds available.

A football club is unlikely to be the lead partner in the development of a full size 3G pitch, unless the project is part of a land/development deal. The following partnership configurations are the more likely:-

- a local authority/education service and club – as a consequence of the replacement of an existing sand filled ATP or upgrade of an existing school hard play area possibly as a result of school modernisation investment creating ‘inspirational’ activity and learning spaces for the future.
- A College/University and Club – as a consequence of the replacement of an existing sand filled Artificial Turf Pitch (ATP)/outdoor grass or hard court area or the creation

of new outdoor sports facilities. In these cases a FE College is likely to be the favoured partner over a university owing to the evening and weekend demands of residential university students.

Colleges and Schools are constantly developing new courses serving new agendas i.e. 14-19 learning pathways; new sixth forms, Welsh Baccalaureate; vocational training and more. Attractive and appropriate sport and physical activity facilities providing for student learning and recreation will be essential to support new sport and leisure learning opportunities.

- A Club/commercial partnership – possible in a few locations where the scale of the catchment area is significant enough to support a business gain. However, this is less likely to be favoured by the Governing Body as the income generation will be lost to the sport/club.
- A Club run ‘Commercial’ 5-a-side centre – a possible income and participation generating facility complementary to a full size high quality natural turf pitch.

### **LOCATION OBJECTIVES**

At this stage, the locations for facilities are best not predetermined. They might be located at clubs or on existing education/other local authority sites in order to maximise use and serve a wide range of the football development objectives. However, it will be essential that a strong club and football development relationship is established at the heart of each project.

Furthermore, facilities will be suitably located in order to impact on a range of objectives:

- Satisfying the needs of football and to benefit more than one club e.g. to:
  - develop football academies;
  - raise standards of provision for football in schools;
  - develop mini football;
  - develop women’s and girls’ football;
  - increase recreational, adult participation leagues;
  - engage young people and disadvantaged communities from Black and Minority Ethnic groups;
  - develop more disability football;
  - create venues for Welsh Football Trust ‘learning centres’.
- Strengthening the strategic distribution of Welsh Premier League clubs;
- Stimulating an increase in the number of accredited and licensed clubs;
- Where appropriate serving as a catalyst/dynamic to bring clubs together and bring junior and senior football closer;
- Supporting more sustainable and stronger clubs embracing the full range of football from the mini and junior game to senior, adult participation.

### **WAY FORWARD**

The Welsh Football Trust is inviting expressions of interest from forward thinking partners who wish to develop ‘exemplar’ projects to help realise its ‘Better Facilities’ vision and encourage other future developments. The Trust is expecting to support up to 5 such projects across Wales. With this in mind:

- Local Authorities are invited to register an expression of interest in working in partnership with the Trust and the local senior football club(s) to identify and support an exemplar 'Better Facilities' football project in their area;
- Clubs in the Welsh Premier League and Welsh League/Cymru Alliance are invited to work with their Local Authority, as above, leading to the support of an expression of interest in developing an exemplar 'Better Facilities' football project in their area.

If selected as a 'preferred partner' of the Welsh Football Trust for the development of an exemplar project, 'applicants' will receive financial support as well as a specialist review of football development in their area. This will take into account the facilities offered by schools, colleges and clubs, alongside which ways of delivering improved football development in their area will be identified.

### **CONCLUSION**

The achievement of the 'Building Better Facilities for the Future' vision undoubtedly requires facilities that can cater for more and improved training and competition. The impetus for this scale of change can not be achieved by the Governing Body of Football alone. However, a national 'Better Facilities' vision and Governing Body support service and funding can be used as a catalyst for change and to encourage the investment of others.