



CUMANN LUTHCHLEAS GAEL
COISTE CHONTAE AONTROMA



Lean ar Aghaidh

STRATEGY
2006 - 2011

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



COMHAIRLE ULADH CLG
ULSTER COUNCIL GAA



Teachtaireacht an Chathaoirligh

As the Antrim County Board celebrates a year of achievement and looks confidently to the future, I am delighted to introduce the five-year strategic document for “Antrim GAA - Lean Ar Aghaidh”

The Ulster Council Strategic Plan “Beir Bua Nua” has helped the province build a strong GAA across the nine counties and has proved to be successful in terms of providing direction and focus for the province. County Antrim must do the same.

Lean Ar Aghaidh, the plan for Antrim, will provide our County with the focus and direction needed for the next step on the ladder of success.

On behalf of the County Executive and County Board, I thank the membership of the Strategic Planning Group under the Chairmanship of Liam O’Kane and thank all the club and county officials who provided the committee with submissions and papers. I would also like to thank the Ulster Council for their support in facilitating the strategic planning process.

The hard work begins now!

Dr. John McSparran
Cathaoirleach, Coiste Chontae Aontroim

Contents

County Chairman’s Foreword - Teachtaireacht an Chathaoirligh	2
Chairman of the SPG Introduction	4
Executive Summary	5
Antrim: The Place and its People	8
Antrim GAA Contexts	13
Developing a Strategy for the GAA in Antrim	16
What our Analyses told us	17
Strategic Themes – Where we want to be: Our Vision for the Future:	21
■ Governance	21
■ Infrastructure	23
■ Culture and Heritage	24
■ Integration and Equality	26
■ Coaching and Games Development	27
■ Rural Development	30
■ Belfast	32
■ Schools	33
■ Finance	36
■ County Teams	37
Implementation and Monitoring	38
Acknowledgements	39



1.0 Executive Summary

Introduction

This Plan sets out a strategic direction for the GAA in Antrim for the next five years and beyond. It was drawn together on the basis of detailed analyses and widespread consultation within the Antrim GAA community and elsewhere. The Plan's aim is to help secure the best possible GAA future for Antrim and its people. That will mean a lot of work across a wide variety of areas: much of that work will involve the continuation of activity that has already been well-embedded into the County's GAA fabric.

Antrim: The Place and its People

Antrim is Ireland's second most populous County (after Dublin) and is also home to Ireland's second city. In broad terms Antrim:

- has a long and varied heritage ... being impacted on directly by most of the great events of Irish history
- brings together a great variety of landscapes and settings ... from inner-city through rural and upland to coastal areas and communities
- is both urban and rural, "new" and traditional in terms of socio-economic patterns and development
- is home to a huge; varied; and growing population ... well over 0.5m people, three-quarters of whom are urban and a quarter of whom are aged under 16
- has a regional and national significance in terms of public services; business; and commerce
- has suffered greatly in terms of the NI conflict ... with almost half the conflict-related deaths occurring here
- experiences some acute levels of deprivation and disadvantage, particularly in North and West Belfast
- is subject to the same social and economic changes as the rest of Ireland ... i.e. changing family and kinship patterns; growing affluence in places; increasing urbanisation; and growing in-migration.

Above all Antrim is not a single homogenous place but is a coming together of a great variety of places; contexts; and communities.

Antrim: The GAA Context

In GAA terms Antrim meanwhile:

- brings together city and country
- develops and delivers both football and hurling
- delivers at both Club and County levels
- has a long, rich and diverse tradition across all the GAA's activities.
- maintained that tradition through the worst years of the NI "Troubles".

There is however a sense that Antrim as a County has underachieved, particularly over the past half-century.

Antrim is home to 51 affiliated GAA Clubs. Of these 15 are football; 11 are hurling; and 25 are dual. The County's GAA business is managed by a County Committee; a Management Executive; and 11 sub-committees. The County also uses an area-based Divisional system for some of its GAA activity.

Introduction to Antrim Strategic Plan

The various units of the Association in the county have identified the major issues which confront us, and these are addressed in this Strategic Plan. Furthermore, the large number of people with a deep abiding interest in our games and culture, who made such valuable contributions via the Strategic Plan questionnaire and the subsequent very successful workshop, have helped to ensure that this is not a plan imposed from the top.

The real value of 2006/2011 plan lies in the fact that the proposals and recommendations contained are the collective views of those most actively involved in the ongoing operation of our county.

Despite the extensive thought and detailed analysis that have led to the production of our plan, it remains merely a plan: the challenge, and it is a significant one, is to convert the multitude of action points into objectives achieved. This will require strong and determined leadership and total and sustained commitment from each and every person who has the interests of the Antrim GAA at heart.

It will benefit us little if we recall in the years to come, that Coiste Chontae Aontroma was among the first in the province, in the current era, to have produced its strategic plan, if the effort and diligence applied to its implementation fall short of what we owe to the future generations of gaels.

In addition, my sincere thanks to my colleagues on the Strategic Plan Committee for producing the attached plan. I pay special tribute to Ryan Feeney, Mark Conway and Stephen McGeehan who, in their representation of the Ulster Council, provided expert guidance and invaluable assistance throughout.

The time has come for C.L.G. Coiste Chontae Aontroma to rise to the challenge.

Liam Ó Catháin

Chairman-Antrim Strategic Planning Group



Taking Antrim Forward: Themes and Actions

The analyses and consultations which underpin this Plan highlighted ten theme areas which people believe are central to the future well-being of the GAA in their County. Each theme was analysed and a series of actions to take it forward then identified. The themes and the actions can be summarised as follows:

Governance

Governance concerns how we carry out our work and how we're organised to do it. This means making sure we do the right things at the right time in the right ways. The core governance issues identified include being organised to best reflect the GAA's overall modernisation agenda and the needs of a County that's large in terms of both area and population; how to deliver the full range of gaelic games; how to promote the GAA to existing and new audiences; and how to improve our capacity to raise funds for the development of the GAA in Antrim.

Actions

- review and streamline the County's administrative and management structures
- improve communications, internal and external
- enhance the image of Antrim GAA
- develop the use of IT/ICT
- publicly promote Antrim GAA activities and achievements

Infrastructure

Without places to play, gaelic games will not develop in the county. Antrim needs proper provision of playing and training facilities, for men and women, football and hurling/camogie, rounders and handball spread across the County. With the demand for facilities growing dramatically and the cost of providing those facilities also soaring, partnership working between the GAA and others will become increasingly important. Finally, it is vital that Casement Park develops as a GAA stadium/centre befitting Ireland's second city.

Actions

- carry out an audit of existing GAA facilities

- improve collaboration with the local government and education sectors
- develop County centres of excellence
- develop and promote Casement Park

Culture and Heritage

The GAA prides itself in being "about more than the games". Gaelic culture needs to be taken forward in parallel with the games. It should be used to strengthen and anchor the games; to "brand" them as uniquely Irish; and to develop the GAA's "whole family" aspects. Crucially the GAA needs to work more with organisations and projects already successfully active in these fields.

Actions

- re-energise Scor
- actively promote the Irish language
- develop gaelic art
- develop a county GAA history and museum/archive
- engage with cultural festivals

Integration and Equality

The GAA sees itself as an all-embracing "family" organisation. Many clubs are already integrated across codes and gender and at County level meaningful and enduring links between the GAA and camogie; handball; rounders; and ladies gaelic football are now needed. Additionally the increasing presence of non-nationals in communities means the GAA must welcome and encourage "the new Irish" to join the Association. Finally, it is equally important that the GAA facilitates full participation by people with disabilities and also promotes social inclusion.

Actions

- establish an Integration and Equality sub-committee
- develop and implement appropriate policies
- cascade these approaches down to Club level

Coaching and Games Development

This is the "core" business of the GAA and has to be central to its work in Antrim. Tangible results on the fields of play do not come overnight and a long term view is necessary. Progress here is inextricably linked with progress in other theme areas, e.g. the provision of infrastructure and work in schools.

Actions

- multi-faceted promotion of, and support to, gaelic games in schools
- development of the numbers and expertise/quality of coaches across the County
- promotion of the "Go Games" approach & ethos
- strategic approach to fixtures at all levels
- support re: Club development
- structured approaches to development squads and schools of excellence

Rural Development

The GAA club was traditionally the mainstay of many of Antrim's rural communities. Rural clubs now face many challenges including: dwindling school numbers; competition from a myriad of other sports; rural planning policies; and issues affecting young people such as obesity, substance abuse and lifestyle choices.

Actions

- research demographic and other trends in rural Antrim
- provide reliable fixtures programmes
- support rural Club developments
- investigate sub-regional indoor provision for gaelic games in rural Antrim

Belfast

As the home of half of Antrim's population and Ireland's second city, it is vital that the GAA is strong in Belfast. A strategy to that end must be drawn up, using good practice templates already developed in other settings such as Derry city.

Actions

- establish a Belfast urban development project
- work in partnership with the City Council
- examine Belfast's demographics and use to inform local coaching and Club development strategies

Schools

Antrim's future GAA well-being depends on its current school population of c48,000 children. A comprehensive; well-structured; and well-resourced approach to the delivery of gaelic games in Antrim's schools is vital.

Actions

- develop schools-based coaching

- enhance Club/school links
- respond to the current and ongoing teacher gender imbalance
- improve resources (GAA and other) for gaelic games in schools
- examine how second-level/colleges could be re-energised

Finance

The promotion of the various aspects of the GAA in Antrim is dependent upon the strongest possible financial base. A professional and proactive approach must be applied to both fundraising and financial management.

Actions

- appraise the County's current financial position
- implement a robust and comprehensive financial management system
- produce and work to a long term financial plan
- develop additional & innovative funding sources.

County Teams

Antrim's County teams are the yardstick for judging the "GAA performance" of the County. As one of the few truly dual counties Antrim faces particular issues here ... but equally has potentially a "double payback". Antrim's teams need to be well thought of by both players and supporters; to be well-prepared; and to be well-resourced.

Actions

- implement structured approaches to the recruitment and retention of managers
- provide leading-edge support and training regimes for Antrim teams
- ensure the best players in Antrim are known by and are available to County teams
- promote Antrim County teams/players as icons of the GAA in the County

Implementation

To ensure the Plan is taken forward in meaningful ways, annual action plans will be developed by all County sub-committees. These will show, in clear measurable ways, how the committees intend to bring life to the Plan's content through their work. At the strategic level an Oversight Committee will be charged, on behalf of the County Committee, with monitoring the production and implementation of the action plans.



Antrim: The Place and its People

The Place

One of 32 Counties in Ireland and nine in Ulster, Antrim is a place of teeming population and great physical and geographic variety. Located on the north-eastern edge of Ireland it brings together a range of landscapes and settings that few other Counties can match. Among these features are:

- Belfast, Ireland's second city
- a substantial coastline, some of which is unspoilt and some of which is heavily industrialised/developed
- high quality lowlands which contrast sharply with remote and marginal uplands
- an historic orientation to Scotland, socially; culturally; and economically
- markedly different urban and rural environments
- strong and jealously-guarded local cultures
- Lough Neagh, the largest inland lake in the British Isles
- only County on the Island with two Cities - Belfast and Lisburn

Antrim also enjoys a very significant heritage, many of the great events and processes of Irish history having directly impacted on it. These have included the Norman conquest; the Plantation of Ulster; the 1798 Rebellion; the Great Famine; and the conflict of the latter years of the 20th Century. That conflict was particularly significant in Antrim: between 1968 and 1993 some 1,400 conflict-related deaths (nearly half the 3,000 that occurred in NI) took place in Antrim. Of these, the vast majority (96%) took place in the greater Belfast area.

Antrim is currently home to a number of services and facilities which operate at a regional and even national level. These include government; shopping/commercial centres; health care provision; third level education; and transport/communication. Antrim therefore has a significance for many people far beyond its own boundaries.

The People

Antrim effectively covers the local government Districts of Antrim; Ballymena; Ballymoney; Belfast (part); Carrickfergus; Larne; Lisburn (part); Moyle; and Newtownabbey. It also includes small parts of Coleraine and Craigavon Districts. At the time of the 2001 Census Antrim was home to some 525,000 people, leaving it second only to Dublin in population terms in Ireland.

In 2009 the 11 District Councils that currently cover County Antrim will be replaced by three new Councils covering Belfast; North Antrim; and South Antrim. These Councils will have increased roles in, among others, the areas of sport/leisure; regeneration/development; tourism; and culture/heritage. The GAA in Antrim will need to develop strong partnerships with these new Councils.

Antrim's 2001 population figure represented an increase of 5% from the 1991 Census. The County's overall population is projected to grow to almost 550,000 by 2013, a further increase of almost 5%. The county has a culturally and diverse population. Antrim's population dynamics however are neither even nor consistent across the County. In board terms urban areas (particularly the suburbs) are growing whilst rural areas are declining. Belfast overall continues to decline whilst part of it (e.g. West Belfast) continues to grow.

ANTRIM: POPULATION DYNAMICS

DISTRICT	1991	2001	2013
Antrim	44,500	48,400	56,200
Ballymena	56,600	58,600	61,300
Ballymoney	24,200	27,000	27,200
Belfast (c 60%)	168,000	166,500	164,500
Carrickfergus	32,700	37,600	41,600
Larne	29,500	30,800	31,300
Lisburn (c50%)	50,000	54,300	60,900
Moyle	14,800	15,900	15,900
Newtownabbey	74,000	80,000	84,600
Others	5,700	5,900	6,000
Total	500,000	525,000	549,500

In common with the rest of Ireland, Antrim is increasingly an urban County. Apart from the Belfast metropolitan area (which brings in Belfast; Lisburn; and Newtownabbey, i.e. around 300,000 people or about half of Antrim's population), the County's main towns are:

TOWN	POPULATION	% OF COUNTY
Ballymena	29,000	6%
Carrickfergus	27,000	5%
Antrim	20,000	4%
Larne	18,000	3%
Ballyclare	9,000	2%
Ballymoney	9,000	2%
Ballycastle	5,000	1%
Randalstown	5,000	1%
Total	122,000	24%

Three-quarters of Antrim's population is therefore urban, with all the consequences for social and economic life and the pressures on space and facilities that urban living brings.

In age structure terms Antrim's population exactly matches that of NI:

AGE GROUP	ANTRIM Nos	ANTRIM %	NI %
0 - 16 year olds	125,000	24%	24%
17 - 59 year olds	304,000	58%	58%
60 and over	96,000	18%	18%

These overall figures however mask a number of local trends and patterns: for example in parts of West Belfast the under 16 population can account for nearly a third of the total population.

In common with the rest of NI, Antrim's population was traditionally very local in origin. By the 2001 Census it was home to some 11,000 people born outside the UK and Ireland. Since then those numbers have increase dramatically and any from 20,000 to 40,000 foreign nationals may now see Antrim as a home. Those numbers are likely to increase and there is a clear role for the GAA in welcoming and integrating these people to the County.



Finally, in the unique community context that NI provides, about a third of the population (around 175,000 people) come from the Catholic/Nationalist tradition and most of the remaining two-thirds from the Protestant/Unionist tradition. Again, these distributions aren't even across the County: segregation has meant many parts of Antrim are almost exclusively either one community or the other.

Overall social patterns in Antrim continue to change dramatically. These include:

- increasingly smaller household sizes
- greater variety in household/family structures, with more flexible and less permanent arrangements
- people being more mobile/transient, with less attachment to place
- people working longer, more flexible hours thus leaving less time for leisure
- greater choices for people in terms of how and where they fill their leisure time
- greater personal and community affluence
- coming to terms with a "post-conflict NI"

Schools and Education

The GAA is an organisation that is primarily for young people. The schools and education settings are therefore important places for the Association to focus on and work in.

Across Antrim there are some 111 primary and 33 second-level schools in the maintained and integrated sectors, distributed as follows:

SCHOOLS / PUPILS IN ANTRIM						
DISTRICT	PRIMARY			SECONDARY		
	MAINTAINED	INTEGRATED	PUPILS	MAINTAINED	INTEGRATED	PUPILS
Antrim	12	3	2419	1	1	810
Ballymena	8	1	1451	2	1	1603
Ballymoney	6	0	935	1	0	227
Belfast	34	2	12581	17	2	17165
Carrickfergus	2	1	145	0	0	0
Craigavon	2		241	0	0	0
Larne	4	1	827	1	0	263
Lisburn	12	2	3848	2	1	1322
Moyle	8	2	1052	3	0	1410
Newtownabbey	5	1	1302	1	0	562
Others	4	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	97	14	24801	28	5	23362

Antrim's total school population amounts to just over 48,000 children ... more than the entire populations, for example, of either Counties Leitrim or Longford. These 48,000 young people have to be seen as the key target audience for the GAA. Not only will they provide the players and volunteers for the Association in Antrim for the next two/three decades at least, but the Association can at the same time contribute hugely to their individual development, as well as to their health and well-being. To take this core part of its business forward to best effect, the GAA in Antrim needs to:

- recognise that some two-thirds of its primary pupils and over three-quarters of its secondary pupils go to school in and around Belfast
- be geared to "sell" itself to and deliver support into almost 150 separate school campuses
- reflect the fact that the distribution of schools is not even across the County
- be aware that the County's schools vary greatly in size/scale
- remember that schools' business is education ... and that they are not beholden to the GAA.

In addition Antrim is home to a very significant third level student community. The main institutions and their student numbers are as follows:

INSTITUTION	STUDENT NUMBERS
BIFHE	43,000
Queen's	17,500
St. Mary's	1,250
Stranmillis	1,200
UU Jordanstown	12,500
TOTAL	74,450

There is significant potential for the GAA in Antrim to collaborate with these institutions and their students in the development of gaelic activities. This is particularly the case with the sharing and even the joint development of facilities.



Deprivation and Disadvantage

As an organisation absolutely rooted in its various communities, the GAA is acutely interested in the overall welfare of those communities. At the same time government is increasingly aware of the potential of sporting and cultural activities to help with regeneration and to improve the well-being of individuals and communities.

In Antrim there is huge scope for action right across these areas. Acute deprivation can be found in both the urban and rural parts of the County. Among Antrim's key deprivation features are:

- under the main measures currently used by government (i.e. reflecting income, employment, health, education, living environment and crime/disorder) Belfast is consistently one of the three most deprived of NI's 26 Council areas
- West and North Belfast contain several of the most deprived of NI's 566 Wards
- Moyle is the fifth most deprived of NI's 26 Districts
- Much of Moyle, Ballymena, Ballymoney and Larne Districts have difficulties regarding the availability of public services.

The GAA has traditionally had a strong presence in many of these areas and has maintained that presence in the face of what were often very difficult circumstances.



Antrim: The GAA Context

Background

Whilst it may be surprising to some, Antrim has possibly the “best” GAA pedigree of any of the Ulster Counties. In GAA terms Antrim:

- brings together city and country
- develops and delivers both football and hurling
- delivers at both Club and County levels
- has a long, rich and diverse tradition across all the GAA’s activities.
- maintained that tradition through the worst years of the NI “Troubles”.

In the early years of the 20th Century, Antrim essentially led the development of the GAA in Ulster, winning Ulster Championships and reaching All-Ireland Finals. Much of that leadership seemed to dissipate after the Second World War however, and as other Counties in Ulster came to the fore Antrim declined. One key contribution Antrim has made in that time has been the development and management of Casement Park, one of the iconic features of the Ulster GAA.

In Summary ...

Antrim is a County which:

- has a long and varied heritage
- brings together a great variety of landscapes and settings
- is both urban and rural, “new” and traditional
- is home to a huge; varied; and growing population
- has a regional and national significance
- has suffered greatly in terms of the NI conflict
- experiences some acute levels of deprivation and disadvantage
- is subject to the same social and economic changes as the rest of Ireland

Above all Antrim is not a single, homogenous place but a coming together of a great variety of places; contexts; and communities.



ANTRIM: SOME ON-THE-FIELD ACHIEVEMENTS

FOOTBALL	LADIES GAELIC FOOTBALL	CAMOGIE	HURLING
All-Ireland U21 titles 1		All-Ireland Senior Titles 6	All-Ireland B titles 3
All-Ireland B titles 1			All-Ireland Intermediate titles 1
All-Ireland Senior Finalists 2			All-Ireland Junior titles 1
All-Ireland U21 Finalists 2			All-Ireland Senior Finalists 2
			All-Ireland Minor Finalists 1
Ulster Senior titles 10	Ulster 16 B League 1	Ulster Senior Titles 16	Ulster Senior titles 47
Ulster Junior titles 7	Ulster U16 Blitz Plate 2		Ulster U21 titles 29
Ulster U21 titles 4	Ulster Ladies U14 Blitz Plate 2		Ulster Minor titles 48
Ulster Minor titles 8	Ulster Club titles 2		
Mc Kenna Cups 6			
Ulster Club titles 3		Ulster Club Titles 13	All-Ireland Club titles 1
All-Ireland Club Finalists 2			Ulster Club titles 31
			All-Ireland Club Finalists 6
Hogan Cups 1			
MacRory Cups 4			

The GAA in Antrim: Some Milestones

Year	Milestone
1885	Belfast Gael's, William Orr's, Lisburn Red Hand's, Belfast Harp's and Divis Ranger's founded as Antrim's first GAA Clubs
1901	First County Board meeting: Antrim win first Ulster Senior Hurling and Football Championships
1908/13	Antrim win six Ulster football titles in a row, reaching All-Ireland Final in 1911 and 1912
1923	St. Malachy's share 1st MacRory Cup
1924	Corrigan Park site bought
1929	St. Malachy's College win first MacRory Cup
1930	Seventy GAA Clubs affiliated in the County
1932	Antrim win Ulster Minor Football Championship
1938	Paddy McNamee elected president of the GAA
1940	Antrim lose All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final to Limerick
1943	Antrim reach first All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final
1951	Antrim win tenth (and last to date) Ulster Senior Football Championship
1953	Casement Park opened
1955	Seamus McFerran elected President of the GAA
1969	Antrim win All-Ireland U21 Football Championship
1970	St. Malachy's College win MacRory Cup; Antrim reach Ulster Senior Football Final
1971	St. Mary's CBS win Hogan Cup; GAA Congress held in Belfast; last Ulster Football Final to date played in Casement Park; Andy McCallin wins Football All-Star
1972	Casement Park occupied by British forces
1974/75	Antrim win two Ulster U21 Football Championships
1978	Antrim win All-Ireland B Hurling Championship; St. John's reach All-Ireland Club Football Final
1980	Ballycastle reach All-Ireland Club Hurling Final ... followed by Rossa (1989) and Dunloy (1995, 1996, 2003; and 2004)
1981	Antrim win All-Ireland B Hurling Championship and McKenna Cup
1982	Antrim win All-Ireland B Hurling Championship and Ulster Minor Football Championship
1983	Loughgiel win All-Ireland Club Hurling Championship; John Gough referees All-Ireland Football Final
1988	Ciaran Barr wins Antrim's First Hurling All-Star
1989	Antrim reach All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final and win Ulster U21 Football Championship
1999	Senior footballers win All-Ireland B Championship
2004	Mariead McGill nee McAtamney named on the Camogie Team of the Century
2006	St. Galls reach All-Ireland Club Football Final; floodlights installed in Casement Park



Internal Structure and Organisation

Fifty-one Clubs are affiliated to the GAA in Antrim. Of these 15 (30%) are football; 11 (20%) are hurling; and 25 (50%) are dual. These Clubs are organised as follows:

DIVISION	FOOTBALL TEAMS	DIVISION	HURLING TEAMS
1	10	1	13
2	11	Reserve	13
3	10	2	11
4	9	3	14
5	11		
6	11		
Totals	62		51

Antrim's leagues in football accommodate "Seconds" teams whilst in hurling Down's three major hurling Clubs are accommodated.

Internally Antrim organises itself on a divisional basis as follows: North Antrim 12 Clubs; South Antrim (essentially Belfast) 22 Clubs; and South West Antrim 17 Clubs. At County level 15 committee are in place:

Executive
Games Administration
Hurling
Football
North Antrim
South Antrim
South West Antrim
Finance
Communications and PR
Coaching
Referees
Discipline
Strategic Development
Grounds
Handball

Infrastructure

For over half a century Casement Park has been a totem for the GAA in Antrim and Ulster. Owned by the Antrim County Committee it is strategically-located in Belfast and has a capacity of 32,600. In 2006 state-of-the-art floodlights were added to the venue. The County Committee also owns lands at Ballygrooby, Randalstown and has a lease on Belfast City Council playing facilities at Woodlands, West Belfast.

Some 41 of Antrim's Clubs own their own facilities/pitches while 17 have at least two pitches. Providing for the demands of both football and hurling; responding to the huge surge in interest in ladies' football specifically and gaelic games generally; and doing these in the urban areas where land is at a premium continue to challenge the Association and its Clubs across Antrim.

Partnership Working

Partnership working is increasingly important within the GAA in Antrim. Examples include:

- closer links with the GAA's Ulster Council, the Association's governing body in the Province
- links, at both County and Club levels, with the Sports Council for NI in the area of financial support for capital infrastructure and games development projects
- working relationships with local authorities in the areas of infrastructure and games development
- liaison with schools and education bodies
- increasing liaison and joint-working with the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, Handball, Rounders and the Camogie Association.



Developing a Strategy for the GAA in Antrim

During the early months of 2006 an Antrim GAA Planning Group came together to draw up this Strategic Plan. The need for the Plan had been prioritised by the County Committee and it fitted with the overall modernisation agenda being rolled out by the GAA's Ulster Council.

The Group brought together people with a variety of backgrounds, experience and knowledge of the GAA in the County. As part of its work the Group met a number of times to discuss and develop the issues that lie at the heart of the Plan. Work on these issues was also developed between meetings.

A questionnaire survey was sent to all Clubs in the County, seeking their feedback on a number of core GAA issues. Two briefing meetings were also held with Clubs. The feedback from all this preparatory work formed the bulk of the agenda for a structured planning workshop, held on 6 May 2006. That workshop attracted some 80 GAA activists representing the Clubs/GAA Units of the Association in Antrim. The workshop focussed on the ten broad themes that provide the framework for this Plan, i.e.

- governance, how the GAA does its business in the County
- the role and place of the GAA in schools
- culture and heritage aspects of the GAA
- infrastructure for gaelic activities in Antrim
- developing and rolling out gaelic games
- County teams
- the GAA in Belfast
- the GAA in rural Antrim
- financial issues
- being more inclusive



What Our Analyses Told Us

As outlined earlier, this Plan was developed over several months and is based on input from a huge number of people across Antrim and beyond. It also incorporates work that was already underway at various levels within the Antrim County GAA structure. This Section summarises what that work and those analyses told us about the needs, issues and priorities within the Antrim GAA. See summary below:

Antrim: The Place

Antrim is a huge, disparate County that brings together a variety of settings and contexts – physical, social, economic, cultural and political. It is increasingly urban in nature and is of course in many ways dominated by Belfast, Ireland's second city. The conflict of the last third-of-a-century impacted massively on Antrim, and particularly on Belfast. Coming out of that conflict remains a core task for everyone.

Antrim: The GAA County

General

Antrim is seen in many ways as a County that “doesn't punch its weight”: that interpretation is based largely on its relative lack of inter-County success. A legacy of the conflict may be a “survivalist attitude”, i.e. one where just surviving is seen as success. Against all that however, Antrim has one of the richest GAA pedigrees of any County; promotes and delivers both football and hurling at levels few other Counties match; maintains a strong city presence; has a robust Club infrastructure; and across the County enjoys a cultural vibrancy that many others do not.

The planning work over time identified ten themes that need to be taken forward if Antrim's GAA performance is to be improved. Those themes, and what underlies them, are presented in turn below.

Governance

At County level Antrim sometimes lacks corporacy ... with individual; sectoral; and local agendas at times out-weighting the overall greater good of the County. There is a tendency to focus on the detail rather than the strategy and a sometimes a sense at Club level that “The County” is something different and even alien: this has to be reversed. County-level management and decision-making can be unwieldy and cumbersome. Communication within the Antrim GAA is spasmodic and ad hoc and critical areas such as fixtures need attention. There also needs to be a focus on the development and promotion of ICT. Antrim's GAA business is vital to the well-being of Antrim people: it needs therefore to be taken forward in a business-like manner. Structures; approaches; and attitudes that were appropriate in different times and which did serve Antrim well in different circumstances need to be re-appraised. Antrim needs to learn from approaches that are being successfully developed elsewhere.

Coaching and Games Development

There is a broad consensus that this represents a critical “missing link” in terms of Antrim's lack of competitive GAA success. Antrim has to invest time; effort; and resources here. There is an equal belief that if gaelic games are to be effectively provided for people of all levels of ability in Antrim – which is a core, underpinning principle of the GAA overall – then these areas need significant attention. Among the areas highlighted for action were:



- structured coaching within Clubs
- gaelic games participation levels, followed by provision of coaching, within schools
- Club fixtures at all levels
- County Development Squads

Antrim needs to make full use of the Ulster Council's games development and coaching templates and programmes.

Infrastructure

More pitches and associated facilities are needed for gaelic games in Antrim. This is particularly the case in the urban areas, which are home to more and more of Antrim's people. Most Clubs, urban and rural, now require at least two pitches to accommodate the demands placed on them. They also need to investigate options such as floodlighting and astro-turf surfaces, to accommodate night-time and year-round gaelic games. There is, equally, potential to make greater use of existing facilities in the education sector. At the same time, District Councils must be persuaded to help provide local gaelic games facilities, again especially in the urban areas. As well as those of players, the infrastructure needs of spectators need to be reflected. At County level the major issues are seen to be the development and use of Casement Park and the provision of County training facilities. There is a particularly strong view that Casement needs to be developed as a GAA flagship ... as befits Ireland's second city and for both Antrim and Ulster.

Schools

Antrim's primary and second level schools bring together the "raw material" of the GAA ... the County's young people. For almost three school-going generations now, Antrim has under performed at schools level. The County's schools are weak competitively, but a number of schools put significant effort into the games and the current strength of Cumann na mBunscol in Antrim has created new opportunities for development within primary schools. During the 2005/2006 year there was some welcome success both at primary and post-primary levels for the county at provincial and national level. Club/school links tend to be haphazard and underdeveloped and there is a lack of clarity as to how and where Antrim's schools should fit within the County's "GAA picture." The teacher gender balance, as elsewhere, has changed dramatically and the GAA's traditional reliance on the male teacher has to be consigned to history.

County Teams

Antrim County teams consistently fail to compete successfully at the highest levels though at the same time few other Counties compete to the standards in both hurling and football that Antrim does. The main issues that need to be addressed are seen to be:

- attaching status and prestige to the Antrim Jersey making it the ultimate goal for all players in the County
- a strategic; structured; and long term approach to County team management, with a strong County Committee/Team management liaison
- balancing the needs and demands of Clubs and County
- resolving conflicts between football and hurling
- providing County players with the right facilities; gear; and supports
- being clear about the role; purpose; and place of Development Squads

Culture and Heritage

Scor, traditionally the anchor of cultural activity in the GAA, is effectively dead in Antrim. Use of the language in GAA settings is often minimal and many GAA premises have little that distinguishes them as GAA places: they could as easily be premises for any other field sports. At the same time "non-GAA" Antrim delivers cultural events, programmes and approaches – e.g. Feile an Phobail and the West Belfast Gaeltacht – that have no equal anywhere else in Ireland. Finally, Antrim has not published a County GAA history (although several of its Clubs have) and has no County GAA archive.

Integration and Equality

Antrim is an increasingly diverse County, a series of places; communities; and individuals from different backgrounds and with different perspectives. The particular local legacies of the NI conflict raise issues of an intensity and scale that other Counties probably don't experience. The Good Friday Agreement prioritises the equality agenda across all aspects of life in Ireland. The main equality and integration issues to be addressed by the GAA in Antrim are seen to be:

- how to grow and develop as a whole family organisation
- the place of women in the GAA and the specific ongoing moves to integrate men's and women's football; camogie; hurling; rounders; and handball
- bringing ethnic minorities and migrant workers into the GAA circle
- reaching out to the non-gaelic tradition in NI

Belfast

Belfast is Ireland's second city and is shared between Antrim and Down. Well over a quarter of a million people (half of Antrim's population) live on the "Antrim side" of what's known as Greater Belfast. Belfast is home to some very strong GAA units and activities ... but equally there are large swathes where the GAA is weak or non-existent. The analyses and consultation underpinning this Plan suggested that in Belfast the GAA needs to:

- improve the participation levels, particularly of the very young
- contribute to regeneration and community development strategies, particularly in the most deprived communities
- build strong Club/school links
- capitalise on Casement Park to a much greater degree
- devise Club competitions to complement schools competitions.

Rural Antrim

The key issues and concerns identified here were the consequences of rural population decline and the increasing pressures placed on young people. Rural communities face many difficulties including farming decline; severe planning restrictions; failing local services; and a drift to the towns. The GAA is seen as a vital anchor in rural Antrim. It is a key means of securing and developing rural communities. Many of those consulted also see the GAA as a bulwark against anti-social behaviour and drug/alcohol abuse by young people.



Strategic Themes

As pointed out earlier in the Plan, the analyses and consultations led to ten themes being identified as central to the well-being and development of the GAA in Antrim. These themes are now considered in detail in this Section.

Each theme is dealt with in the same way. First, a rationale summarising why the theme is important and what are its main "sub-sets" is presented. After that the various strategies developed to take the theme forward are listed. Each strategy or action is outlined; those involved in taking it forward are identified; a timescale for it is put forward; and finally the outcomes sought as a result are included. The timescales used are:

- short-term: year one/two
- medium-term: year two/three
- long-term: year five

The inclusion of outcomes in this Section is very deliberate. Without stated outcomes that can be measured in some way, it is very difficult to know if progress is being made ... and making progress for the GAA in Antrim is what this Plan is about. In the same way every outcome listed can be tracked back to an issue raised at some stage in the consultation and Plan preparation stages.

Glossary of Terms

- CAM - County Administration Manager
- HDM - Hurling Development Manager
- FDM - Football Development Manager
- RDO - Regional Development Officer
- GPO - Games Promotion Officer
- ICT - Information Communication Technology

GOVERNANCE

Governance concerns how we carry out our work and how we're organised to do it. Because we believe our GAA work is important, the governance of that work is central to our success. This Strategy is about making sure we do the right things in terms of the GAA in Antrim. By paying attention to governance we will make sure we do those right things in the right ways. Our analyses and consultations have identified a number of core governance issues for us. This includes being organised to best reflect the GAA's overall modernisation agenda and the needs of a County that's large in terms of both area and population. Governance is also focused on delivering the full range of gaelic games: continually promoting the GAA to existing and new audiences and improving our capacity to raise funds for the development of the GAA in our County.



Finance

The huge range and volume of work undertaken by the GAA in Antrim, as elsewhere, demands equally huge resources. It is a central GAA principle that the bulk of these will be provided through voluntary input, but money is also needed to help with the Association's work in the County and particularly to help implement this Plan. The priorities identified through the planning process were:

- development of robust financial planning and budgeting systems within the County structure
- continuing development of Club Aontroma to help fund GAA activities in the County
- maximising of sponsorship income
- securing income from non-traditional sources, e.g. government regeneration budgets

The Antrim GAA SWOT Analysis

Based on the work outlined above the following SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the GAA in Antrim was produced. Strengths and weakness are things internal to the GAA in Antrim and over which the county has control. Opportunities and threats meanwhile are external to the GAA over which the county has no direct control but of which it must be aware, and to which it must respond.

Strengths ☺

- Good Club infrastructure and facilities
- Casement Park
- Football and hurling promoted
- Club Aontroma
- Strong GAA tradition
- Strong cultural tradition

Threats ☹

- Urban growth not matched by parallel GAA growth
- Rural decline
- Disaffection/alienation of people/ communities
- Few male teachers in schools
- Decline in volunteerism/altruism
- Political opposition to GAA
- Exponential growth in governance requirements

Weaknesses ☹

- Corporate governance
- Low focus on culture/heritage
- Limited achievement at County level
- Periodic football/hurling conflict
- Periodic Club/County conflict
- Marketing and PR
- Limited involvement of women
- Burnout of young players
- Lack of "Antrim corporacy"

Opportunities ☺

- Current popularity of gaelic games
- Belfast and other urban areas
- Integration with women's gaelic games
- Inclusion of people from non-GAA backgrounds
- Contribution to health/lifestyle issues
- Burgeoning youth population
- Coaching/games development support from Ulster Council
- Partnerships with others, e.g. Councils; schools
- Cumann na mBunscol



STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Structure and Overall Governance: A total review of the County by-laws in order to implement the recommendations of strategic plan.	County Executive Strategic Planning Group	Short-Term	A system to GAA rules that better reflects the needs and realities of modern Antrim.
Merge positions of Chairman and Central Council Delegate into one post.	County Executive / County Committee	Short-Term	Proper representation and strategic link with National GAA.
CAM becomes a non-voting member of the Management Committee.	County Executive / County Committee	Short-Term	Effective fulfilment of the role of the County Administration Manager.
Appoint a working committee to: Review present structures of governance in Antrim CLG including all existing committees and the three Divisional Boards highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. Produce a model of governance that streamlines structures, reduces bureaucracy and works more efficiently.	County Executive	Short-Term	Efficient and effective County structures which reflect the current and future needs and aspirations of Antrim CLG.
Communications: Establish PR, Communications, and Marketing Committee with strong links to Club Aontroma.	PRO/ Club Aontroma	Short-Term	Increased awareness and understanding of the GAA in Antrim as a vibrant & family orientated organisation.
Establish a “brand” of Antrim GAA, and promote a new corporate image.	PR Committee/ Club Aontroma	Medium-Term	As Above
All Clubs appoint a PRO.	County Board/PRO	Medium-Term	Promotion of events and programmes at Club Level.
Maximise and exploit the use of ICT for intra-county communications.	ICT Committee/ CAM/Secretary	Medium-Term	More efficient and effective lines of communication.
Provide ICT training courses for club and County officers.	CAM/ICT Committee/ Secretary	Long-Term	As Above
Production of an annual county information manual released in January that includes contacts for Chairpersons, Secretaries, Youth Officers, Coaching Officers, and team management from youth to Senior Level.	PR Committee /PRO/GAC	Short-Term	One point of contact for all bodies promoting Gaelic Games in the County.
Annual County Yearbook released before Christmas that reviews Gaelic Games in Antrim the previous year.	PR Committee/ PRO	Short-Term	An annual record of the events and achievements of the county during the year.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Without places to play, games will not develop in the county. Antrim needs proper provision of playing and training facilities, for men and women, football and hurling/camogie, rounders and handball spread across the County. Traditionally the GAA has developed its own infrastructure but with the demand for facilities growing dramatically and the cost of providing those facilities also soaring – particularly in the urban areas – partnership working with others will become increasingly important. Finally, Casement Park will continue to be central to the GAA in Antrim. It is vital that it develops as a GAA stadium/centre befitting Ireland’s second city as a flagship for the stewardship and ambition of the GAA in County Antrim.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Facilities Audit: Carry out an audit of all facilities for gaelic games in Antrim (GAA, education, Council, and other) to establish Who provides What, Where, and to what Standard/Quality.	Grounds Committee	Short-Term	Audit presented to County Executive within six months.
Collaboration with Councils: On foot of the Audit, develop with Antrim Councils strategies for the provision of municipal gaelic games facilities across the County.	Grounds Committee	Medium-Term	Council facilities for gaelic games in each of the current nine Council areas.
Collaboration with Education Sector: On foot of the Audit, and in line with the Schools and Games Development Themes of this Strategy, collaborate with the Education Sector (including Third Level) to achieve a better shared use of GAA and education-based facilities.	Schools and College Committee	Medium-Term	Appropriate shared year-round use of all gaelic games facilities across Antrim.
County Centres of Excellence: Using audit feedback, draw up and implement plans for the appropriate development of two County Centres of Excellence (one urban based in Belfast and one rural) and possibly other(s) as Antrim GAA managed facilities.	County Executive Club Antrim	Long-Term	A facilities infrastructure in place that accommodates the needs of Antrim GAA at County level.
Casement Park: Draw up plans for the development and promotion of Casement Park as a stadium/complex which reflects the status of Belfast as Ireland’s second city and Casement Park’s iconic position within Antrim and Ulster GAA. The immediate improvements will include a further increase in capacity by improving exits at Owenvaragh and Mooreland Park. Providing a TV studio and establishing a new build Control Room.	County Executive Ulster Council	Medium-Term	A modern, attractive, open and welcoming Casement Park (that meets SRC Report Level 2/3 standard) with substantially-increased covered, seated accommodation; a GAA museum/cultural/heritage centre; revenue-earning conference facilities; and clear gaelic art components.



CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The GAA prides itself in being “about more than the games”. Gaelic culture – music, language, dance and art – needs to be taken forward in parallel with the games. It should be used to strengthen and anchor the games, to “brand” them as uniquely Irish and to develop the Association’s “whole family” aspects. Crucially the GAA needs to collaborate more with organisations and projects already successfully active in these fields: Antrim, both city and country, is particularly well-placed in this regard.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Club: Have a Cultural Officer appointed to every club.	Oifigeach Cultuir	Short-Term	An active, working Cultural Officer in every Club.
Scor: Re-energise Scor at senior and junior levels across the County and use Scor competitors as part of the “promotion package” at County GAA events (e.g. singing the National Anthem at games).	Divisional Cultural Officer	Medium-Term	At least 70% of Clubs, year-on-year, participating in Scor, at either senior or junior levels.
Irish Language: Provide an annual opportunity for GAA officers and members to learn basic Irish. Provide an extensive programme throughout the club structure to encourage the learning of Irish.	County Management	Medium-Term	Capacity to “meet and greet” in Irish in every GAA setting in Antrim.
Ensure “St. Patrick’s Day Language Collections” are taken up in every Club area to fund Gaeltacht bursaries for local children.	Cultural Officer	Short-Term	Clear local support (and awareness of that support) for children attending Gaeltacht courses.
Develop a strategy to ensure bi-lingual signage throughout all GAA facilities in the County. Undertake a series of events which highlight the role the Irish language plays in the life of CLG.	Cultural Officer Club Cultural officers	Medium-Term	Bi-lingual signage in all Antrim GAA facilities ... and therefore a wider recognition of basic Irish terms and phrases.
Gaelic Art: Encourage all new GAA capital developments to include a Gaelic Art component: County Executive to ensure public gaelic art components as part of all County GAA developments.	County Management Club Cultural Officers	Long-Term	Clear “branding” of GAA facilities as gaelic in style and ethos (for both users and passers-by).
County History: Commission a history of the GAA in County Antrim.	County PR Committee	Medium-Term	County history published by 2010 ... leading to a better and wider understanding of Antrim’s GAA heritage and the contexts for present and future work.

County Museum/Archive Centre: Develop (probably within the Casement Park complex) an Antrim County GAA museum and archive centre which will preserve and display materials central to the Antrim GAA story.	County Management County PR Committee	Medium-Term	A central facility/resource which collates and presents the County’s GAA heritage ... thereby acknowledging the past and simultaneously inspiring the future.
Cultural Festivals: Engage with organisers of existing festivals in Antrim (e.g. Feile an Phobail) to provide GAA support to these events.	County Management County PR Committee	Short-Term	GAA resources (people and facilities) made available to major existing cultural festivals ... and as appropriate, GAA components included within them.
Gaelic Games: As a means of recognising the fact that Antrim has a very large number of Irish speakers, hold a special sporting competition, focused on rounders (so as to be as inclusive as possible), in celebration of this fact.	Oifigeach Chultuir and Divisional officers with support from club Cultural Officers	Short-Term	An annual, open-to-all, Irish language-focused sporting event that’s clearly branded by and associated with the GAA.
Tráth Na gCeisteanna: Establish an Irish Language Quiz as an annual competition with the County Champions going forward as the County’s representatives in the provincial competition.	County Management Club Cultural Officers	Medium-Term	An annual, open-to-all, Irish language-focused cultural/ heritage event that’s clearly branded by and associated with the GAA.





INTEGRATION AND EQUALITY

The GAA prides itself on being an all-embracing “family” organisation. In many communities, clubs have already integrated in terms of governance and have taken a holistic approach to the promotion of Gaelic Games and Culture. The Antrim County Board must establish meaningful and enduring links with the County Committees of Camogie, Handball, Rounders, and Ladies Gaelic Football in order to develop a cohesive approach to the development of the “Gaelic way of life.” Additionally the increasing presence of non-nationals in communities means the Association must welcome and encourage “the new Irish” to join the Association. Finally the Antrim County Board must create meaningful policies with action plans that encourage active participation catering for the disabled and promoting social inclusion.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Representation: Establish an Integration and Equality Sub-Committee with representatives from the Camogie, Ladies, Handball and Rounders County Boards. The committee should also include members who have a background in catering for those with disabilities or who have experience in equality issues.	Executive Committee	Short-Term	A strong robust integration and equality agenda that ensures that Antrim GAA caters for all sections of the community.
Integration: Delegates from Ladies Gaelic, Camogie, Rounders and Handball sitting on the County Board.	County Committee	Short-Term	Clear representation from the “other” Gaelic organisations on the Counties Governing body.
Structure: A new portfolio (officer) for Integration and Equality at Management Committee Level.	County Committee	Short-Term	One officer at Management Committee promoting and driving the integration and equality agenda.
Policy: Establishing four workgroups to design and implement the following policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability Equality and Inclusion Community Outreach (ethnic minorities/social disadvantage/religion) Each workgroup would consult with the relevant government departments and representative organisations.	County Management Integration and Equality Officer CAM	Medium-Term	Clear policies and action steps on the key areas of inclusion. Disability Games being promoted and catered for by Antrim GAA in the annual Coaching and Games programme. Clear structures in place for attracting new members from “non-GAA” backgrounds.
Promotion and Information: Promotion of the Integration and Equality agenda and strategy at club level.	Integration and Equality Committee Integration and Equality Officer Ulster Council Staff	Long-Term	Clubs aware of integration and ensuring that the policy is being implemented at club level.

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Coaching and Games Development is the “core” business of the GAA. It is accepted that good planning and development over a set timeframe can yield on-field results. The Antrim County Board accepts that success will not come “overnight” and that this five year plan will lay the foundations for future success. Additionally the completion of the floodlights in Casement Park creates new opportunities for further increasing participation in all codes and at all levels in urban Belfast.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Schools Coaching: To further develop the roles of CAM, HDM and FDM.	County Executive	Short-Term	To further develop the availability and standards of coaching in all schools both primary and post primary in Co. Antrim for Football (Boys and Girls), Hurling, Camogie and Handball over the next 5 years.
To employ 2 full-time GPOs for the county.	CAM/County Executive	Short-Term	As Above
To establish 12 schools coaches by the end of 2007, and further increase the coaching resources to suit the U-18 population.	County Executive/ Coaching & Games Development Committee/ Cumann na mBunscol	Medium-Term	To develop the management of coaching provision in order to provide coaching in all schools twice per year per school for at least 2 six week blocks.
Go Games will be encouraged in all schools especially Primary Schools, to promote the participation of children in schools and the games as fun for the children.	FDM/HDM/ Cumann na mBunscol	Medium-Term	To develop suitable games in all codes so that participation and skills acquisition is maximised as opposed to a competitive only approach.
Seminars set up to promote Gaelic Games to teachers and principals in Integrated and Controlled Sectors additionally providing coaches to coach in Integrated and Controlled Schools.	FDM/HDM/ Coaching Officer	Medium-Term	To target and promote Gaelic Games in Integrated and Controlled Schools.
Coach Education: Investigate the feasibility of employing a full-time Coaching Education Officer within the county.	County Executive Coaching and Games Development Committee/ Cumann na mBunscol	Short-Term	A key-person to coordinate the development of Gaelic Games in all schools. This post will have a key role in developing club/ school links.



To establish and devise interim coaching courses for Antrim clubs and schools to supplement Foundation & Level Coaching grades.	HDM/FDM/ Ulster Council-RDO	Medium-Term	To increase the number of adult coaches in every club and school.
Coaching courses at all the above levels are available every quarter in all regions. (every 3 months)	Ulster Council – RDO/HDM/FDM	Short-Term	To improve the standards of coaching in all schools and clubs.
Club mentors are required to re-visit their present level of coaching grade every 2 years (refresher courses), or opt for a higher grade.	HDM/FDM Coaching & Games Development Committee	Medium-Term	To increase the frequency of coaching courses for club mentors and teachers.
Fixtures: An All County Fixtures Booklet will be completed and agreed by February 2007.	CAM/County Executive	Short-Term	To establish an All County Fixtures Booklet for all codes.
All clubs sign up to a Code of Conduct regarding the fulfilment of fixtures (Failure to adhere to Code of Conduct will require a sanction on the club).	County Committee County Sub Division Committees Clubs	Medium-Term	To develop a culture of completing and fulfilling fixture obligations for all codes and at all levels.
Antrim will follow the national recommendations regarding fixtures, codes of conduct etc.	GAC/CAM/County Executive	Medium-Term	As Above
U8, U10, and U12 teams will participate in Go Games activities.	FDM/HDM Bord na nÓg	Short-Term	To promote Go Games to maximise participation, skills and fun at juvenile levels for all codes.
Club Development: Workshops for Coaching and Games Development.	FDM/HDM/ Coaching and Games Development Committee/Ulster Council RDO	Short-Term	Ensuring that each club has a strategy for promotion of coaching and games.
Club Development Plan seminars organised in the sub regions.	CAM/Development Officer/Ulster Council Staff/ Regional Committees	Medium-Term	To ensure each club has a overall Development Plan.
A generic audit template and workshops provided to clubs to assist in the development of club strategic plans.	CAM/ Development Officer/Ulster Council Staff	Medium-Term	As Above

Development Squads/Schools of Excellence: Regional Schools of Excellence will be established in West, North, East and South Belfast, Randalstown, Crumlin, Ballymena, Cushendall and Ballycastle.	County Executive/ HDM/FDM Coaching & Games Development Committee	Medium-Term	To increase the numbers of players at various ages who avail of higher grade intensive coaching at all codes.
30 players will be chosen for each Regional School of Excellence in all codes at 16-17 years old, 19-20 years old. (30 x 7 regions x 4 codes) Total = 840 players. Handball will choose 12 per region.	FDM/HDM/GPOs Coaching and Games Development Committee/Handball delegates	Long-Term	As Above
Players of Regional Schools of Excellence will be monitored by minor and senior County managers.	FDM/HDM/GPOs Coaching & Games Development Committee	Medium-Term	To increase the numbers of quality coaches available for higher grade coaching sessions.
Players will sign up to commitment contract to ensure full participation.	County Executive/ FDM/HDM/GPOs Coaching & Games Development Committee	Medium-Term	To increase the annual number of coaching sessions for players and to ensure attendance at each session.
Referees: Referees Committee to be renamed "Referees Development Committee" with responsibility for the overall development of Refereeing within the County.	Referees Committee	Short-Term	One Committee with responsibility for the overall development and promotion of refereeing within the county.
Referees Coordinator becomes a member of the Management Committee.	Management Committee/ County Board	Short-Term	An officer with responsibility for refereeing at Management level.
Establishment of a Referees Academy similar to the model that has been established at provincial Level with 6-8 referees taking part in the academy on annual basis.	Hurling/Football Development Managers/ Referees Coordinator	Medium-Term	A training model to improve the county's "elite" referees on an annual basis.
Quarterly referee seminars and workshops for all county referees.	Hurling/Football Development Managers/ Referees Coordinator/ Referees Development Committee	Medium-Term	Continuing Professional Development programme for referees at County Level.
Establish a referee recruitment programme tied into the coaching and games development programme.	Hurling/Football Development Managers/ Referees Coordinator/ Referees Development Committee	Short-Term	To improve the profile and status of referees within the county.

Establish the Young Whistlers Programme as a central theme to the county education and coaching and games development programme.	Hurling/Football Development Managers/ Referees Co-ordinator/Referees Development Committee/Cumann na mBunscol/Bord na nÓg	Short-Term	Promotion of Refereeing amongst young players and administrators.
--	--	------------	---



RURAL DEVELOPMENT

For many years the GAA club in rural areas was the main, perhaps the only conduit for sporting activity. It also provided people with opportunities to meet and enjoy other cultural activities like drama, dancing, making music etc. The biggest threat to rural GAA clubs for generations was emigration. However at the start of the 21st century, Antrim GAA must contend with a number of different issues that seriously challenge the future of gaelic games in rural areas and they include: dwindling school numbers, competition from a myriad of other sports for our youth, planning restrictions on the building of new houses in the countryside and social problems pertinent to young people like alcohol abuse, addiction to drugs and obesity.

Our analyses and consultations have identified a number of core issues. These include:

- Creating fixture-lists that ensure games are played on a regular basis
- Asking rural GAA clubs to be proactive in the process of educating our youth about a healthy lifestyle and the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse in general
- Carrying out research to inform planning for the future of GAA in rural areas
- Looking at existing facilities and seeing how we can develop them to attract and hold on to future generations of GAA players

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Fixtures: Draw up an annual fixture list that provides senior club players with games on a regular basis.	Games Administration Committee N Antrim SW Antrim	Short-Term	A fixture list that ensures senior club players have at least 20 games per year spread over a reasonable time period.

Governance/Administration: Investigate the feasibility of an appointment of an Education Officer to oversee the North Antrim & SW Antrim Areas.	Executive Committee N Antrim & SW Boards	Medium-Term	This person would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire and disseminate information about finances, grants & good practice that would help develop clubs. He/she would assist with applications for grants, planning etc. • Organise workshops that help inform clubs to operate more smoothly and informs about development plans, infrastructure etc. • Liaise with governing bodies of GAA. • Visit all schools to promote gaelic games amongst pupils & staff. • Organise workshops/ visits that highlight e.g. the effects of alcohol or drug abuse. • Help clubs, schools & colleges to organise games, blitzes, summer camps etc.
Facilities: Investigate the feasibility of building two large indoor facilities that are centrally located: one in North & one in S W Antrim. Each building would have a large hall, changing facilities, handball courts and meeting room and may be linked to education.	Management N & SW Antrim Boards Handball Committee	Short- Term	These would provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-year round facilities for the coaching and playing of gaelic games. • The opportunity to promote handball in N & SW Antrim. • More all-year round training and playing facilities for gaelic clubs.
Encourage gaelic clubs and their communities to look for & secure all-weather facilities from their local councils.	Management North & SW Antrim Boards Communications & PR committee	Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More all-year round training and playing facilities for gaelic clubs.
Research: Appoint a placement student or research student to carry out research about demographics and trends in rural areas of Antrim.	Management North & SW Antrim	Short-Term	A report that will inform and direct GAA planning and strategy in rural Antrim over the next 5 to 10 years.



BELFAST

Belfast is the second largest urban area on the island with a population of approx. 270,000. The Antrim County Board must now focus on a strategy to further develop Gaelic Games in the City. The success of the Derry City urban scheme has resulted in a working template which could be used in further development of Belfast.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Strategy: Establish an Urban Development Scheme Similar to Derry City Council in Belfast.	CAM/Executive Committee/Ulster Council	Medium-Term	Set up a working group in partnership with Ulster Council GAA to focus on Development of Gaelic Games.
Collaboration with Belfast City Council: Establish a link with Belfast City Council via Councillors and Staff with view to explore the possibilities of strategic partnership. Set up working groups to oversee development of Belfast.	CAM/Executive Committee/Ulster Council Belfast Oversight Group	Medium-Term	Collaboration with Local Government to achieve social and GAA targets.
Audit: Obtain figures on school numbers and local demographics, which will focus on areas of development within the different clubs and areas. The audit will also highlight the Coaching requirements of the schools and clubs.	CAM/Executive Committee/Ulster Council Outside Consultants Belfast Oversight Group	Long -Term	Audit to establish the current level and stage of Gaelic Games in the City and also assist in setting targets.
Planning: Draft a specific strategy with set targets which will assist the Antrim County Board, Ulster Council, Belfast City Council and key stakeholders.	Belfast Oversight Group	Long-Term	A plan for Belfast which will assist all the GAA stakeholders and local government in achieving a strong and robust GAA.

SCHOOLS

Promotion of Gaelic Games at schools level is crucial to the overall success of our Games in Antrim. This strategy is about setting achievable targets that will provide structures that help ensure the involvement of schools in Gaelic Games in both the short and long term. It is about:

- providing schools with appropriate levels of centrally funded coaching
- assisting schools and clubs in developing their capacity to provide appropriate coaching
- ensuring that the next generation of teachers (particularly female teachers) are equipped to provide quality coaching
- ensuring opportunities for pupil participation in Gaelic games throughout school life
- promoting Gaelic Games in schools that are not currently involved in our sports across all sectors (maintained/controlled/integrated)
- enhancing schools administration
- developing strong links between clubs and their local schools
- sourcing and providing the finance for these plans
- establishing and developing links with Special Schools

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Development of Coaching in Schools: Establish a club/school link education officer within County Management Committee structure.	County Board County Board Education Officer	Short-Term	Club/school link officer in place following Annual Convention elections 2006
Ensure coaching provision on a regular basis in all schools.	County Coaching Tutors	Short-Term	Every primary school in County provided with coaching for at least 12 weeks per year (2 blocks of 6 wks)
Emphasis on Year 8 pupil participation/competition.	Ulster Council (FUNdamental programme etc)	Short-Term	
Devise a pro-active coaching framework for all employed coaches including GAA education, games promotion, developing club/school links, accountability etc.	Cumann Na mBunscol Vocational Schools/Colleges Governing Bodies	Short-Term	Annual year eight competitions (possibly floodlit at Casement Park) started during year 1 of plan.
Ensure all coaches can coach all codes.	Club school links officers	Short-Term	Coaching education programme to develop qualifications of present coaches in all codes.
Promote positive discrimination in coaching re: coaching qualifications specifically for female teachers/teaching students.	Coaching Committee Interegration Officer	Short-Term	New coaches appointed to be qualified in coaching all codes.



Develop links with Queens University, University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College, St. Mary's University College to further develop provision of schools coaches with particular reference to PE student school placement.	Education Officer Staff	Short-Term	Increase number of female teachers/teaching students/ 6 th year students in Antrim with foundation level coaching qualifications.
As above with 2 nd level education providers e.g. 6 th Year Students.	Education Officer Staff	Medium-Term	Increase number of female teachers/teaching students/ 6 th year students in Antrim with level 1 coaching qualifications.
Provide appropriate coaching software to all schools with associated training in use.	Coaching Committee Staff	Medium-Term	All schools to be equipped with appropriate coaching software by end 2007.
Provide greater access to Casement Park for school use.	County Board	Medium-Term	Planned timetable of schools use for Casement by beginning 2006/07 school year.
Club/School Links: Establish a club/school link education officer within County Management Committee structure.	County Board Education Officer	Short-Term	Club/school link officer in place following Annual Convention elections 2006.
Establish clear definition of roles/responsibilities for the above including monitoring role.	Cumann Na mBunscol Coaching Committee	Short-Term	Ensure all clubs have "Coaches/Parents Code of Conduct" by 2007/08 (emphasis on Child Protection)
Ensure a club/school link officer in every club.	Vocational Schools/ Colleges Governing Bodies	Short-Term	Roles/responsibilities established prior to election with input from all relevant bodies.
Provide training for these officers to ensure development of long-term and sustainable club/school links.	Club/school links officers	Short-Term	All clubs have a club/school links coordinator in place following 2006 AGM.
Audit current club/school links with view to "Filling Gaps".	Staff	Short-Term	Training for all club/school links officers provided by County Board during 2007 closed season.
Source information on good practice re: club school links (within & outside county) and publish/circulate best practice documentation to school and clubs.	Ulster Council Staff	Short-Term	Audit completed by County club/school links officer prior to provision of the above training.

Develop club/school links with those schools not normally associated with Gaelic sports.	Ulster Council Staff County Board County Board Education Officer Cumann Na mBunscol	Short-Term	Best practice documentation in place for above training. Following above developments non-traditional GAA schools (to include Maintained, Controlled, Integrated) to be approached by County representatives offering club links programme by end of 2008.
College/Vocational School Issue: Approach those already involved in college competition (internal/ external) leading to "Think-Tank" approach to guide future development over span of plan.	County Board County Board Education Officer	Short-Term	"Think-Tank" established during year 1 of plan and reporting back to county committee within 6 months.
Emphasis on strengthening/ consolidating Year 8 pupil participation/competition.	Cumann Na mBunscol Vocational Schools/Colleges Governing Bodies Club/school links officers	Short-Term Medium-Term	Win MacRory/McLarnon /Megeen Cups during life of plan building on the college successes of 2006. Increase Year 8 involvement in Gaelic Games to ensure "drop-off" rates at this age decrease considerably.
Utilise facilities at Colleges of Education/Universities for benefit of 2 nd level students esp: University of Ulster High Performance Unit/Programme.	Ulster Council Staff County Board	Medium-Term	University facilities being used regularly by local colleges/vocational schools by year 2 of plan.
Overall Schools Committee: Develop a committee representing all GAA school governing bodies within the county.	County Board	Medium-Term	Committee established and meeting regularly throughout school year.
Ensure all clubs are aware of both the body's existence and its roles/responsibilities.	County Board	Medium-Term	Information session with all clubs to take place to disseminate committee role.
Encourage all clubs to work closely with the committee at local level for overall benefit of GAA activity in County.	County Board	Short-Term	Accountability framework built into process.
Link the work of the committee with the County finance committee/ Club Aontroma.	County Board Club Aontroma	Short-Term	Provision of adequate and justified finance to ensure plans of committee come to fruition.



FINANCE

No large organisation can develop and prosper without funding. The promotion of the various aspects of the association in the County is dependent upon the strongest possible financial base. A professional and proactive approach must be applied, in the area of fundraising, with maximum exploitation of all avenues for generating income. Allied with firm financial controls and robust procedures to manage expenditure, this will ensure that the county moves forward successfully both on the playing field and in all of its related activities.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Finance Committee: Establish Antrim County Board Finance Committee - Chaired by County Treasurer.	County Executive/ County Committee	Short-Term	Proper and effective control of all aspects of county finances.
Appraisal: Carry out an appraisal of the current position regarding finances and assets of the County.	Finance Committee Club Aontroma	Short-Term	Report and suggest recommendations to the Committee, followed by the implementation of the suggested outcomes.
Procedures and Budgets: Draw up financial systems and procedures with strict authorisation limits, to include sourcing, receiving and recording income and control of expenditure.	Finance Committee	Short-Term	Suitable budget and authorisation limits in place and the ability to respond in a timely and accurate manner to queries.
Financial Plan: Produce a financial plan for the next five years, giving detailed projections of income and expenditure and the financial implications of implementing Strategic Plan.	Finance Committee	Short-Term	A realistic and achievable five year financial plan which has the flexibility to be reviewed and amended on a regular basis (at least annually).
Sources of Funding: Identify and exploit all possible funding opportunities. Widen existing avenues of funding, research new avenues and adopt a proactive approach.	Finance Committee County Development Officer Club Aontroma	Short-Term	The County is placed on a sound financial footing and is enabled to generate a surplus.

COUNTY TEAMS

Our county teams are the yardstick for judging the performance of the county. No matter how we do things in other areas, people inside and outside of the county will judge us by how our county teams perform. It is important therefore to prepare our teams in a modern sporting environment using the latest techniques under the guidance of efficient and knowledgeable management teams. County teams, especially at senior level, have a tremendous impact on the public and our supporters. A team which can be seen to be making steady improvement will gather support from around the county and help to establish a good atmosphere. If the management, support group and players are seen to be part of a unified group dedicated to improvement then the positive spin off is beyond measure.

STRATEGY	LED BY/ INVOLVING	TIMESCALE	OUTCOME SOUGHT
Player Support: Provide the best possible management systems for our county teams. Identify gaps in our setup (individual training programmes, diet requirements, physiology, strength & conditioning etc.)	County Executive	Short-Term	Professional support systems for our county teams to be in place by November 2007.
Management: Establish selection recruitment and interview procedures to be applied when appointing future managers at all levels. Set up interview panels with adequate expertise to assess candidates with particular awareness of continuous experience.	County Executive	Short-Term	Personnel meeting criteria for posts to be sourced and made aware of their role as soon as possible.
Training: Establish a proper training regime for our county teams with support facilities to cater for all our teams needs. Draft a code of conduct/agreement that will clearly outline the players benefits and responsibilities. Establish procedures with fast and efficient lines of communication to and from Executive.	County Executive	Short-Term	Improved standard of organisation in County teams. Clear understanding of the role of player and manager and clear communication structure.
Committees: Review the roles of football and hurling committees with a view to establishing mechanisms to better promote both codes.	County Executive Committee Chairs	Short-Term	A more efficient support system for hurling and football.
Recruitment: Develop a scouting network for all levels in both codes.	Marketing and PR Committees, Club Aontroma & Team Managements	Short-Term	To have systems in place for U14 & U16 by year 2 end & for all teams by end of year 5.
Spectator Support: Generate more spectator support for County Teams through more visits to schools and club juvenile sections.	County Executive Involving Finance Committee Servicing Officers & players reps.	Long-Term	Increasing the profile and "brand" of Antrim Gaelic Games.

Implementation and Monitoring of the Five Year Plan

The success of our plan depends on its effective implementation. To ensure that such implementation occurs it is vital that a robust monitoring strategy is devised. This will allow regular monitoring and evaluation of progress regarding meeting the agreed targets contained within the plan.

It is envisaged that each core element of the plan will be implemented via an action plan committee structure, making use where possible of sub-committees already in operation within the County. Each committee will be charged with devising an appropriate action plan relevant to their core area (e.g. County Governance) to run for a twelve month period. Action plans will establish a baseline position, devise measurable targets and set success criteria etc. It is envisaged that each action plan committee will develop five such plans over the lifespan of the overall Strategic plan, with the first being completed within six weeks of the committee being established.

A strategic oversight group will be proposed by County Executive and ratified by County Committee. This body will be established within six weeks of County Convention 2006. They will meet with the representatives of the various action planning committees on a two monthly basis and will follow their discussion with a full report to the County Executive/County Committee at the next available opportunity. This will ensure transparency and accountability and help to provide the various units of the association in Antrim with valuable updates on progress being made.



Acknowledgements

The Antrim County Board GAA would like to acknowledge our appreciation for the hard work and effort of the Strategic Planning Workgroup:

Liam O'Kane (Chairman)
Jim Brady
Joe Edwards
Alex Emerson
Jim Murray
Dr. John McSparron
Jim Mclean
Eamon Prenter
Martin Short

Antrim County Board GAA would also like to acknowledge the club delegates and other individuals who attended the strategic planning workshop. Additionally thank you to various individuals who submitted responses and provided papers to the Strategic Planning Group for their efforts and support in providing ideas, giving feedback and proof reading the various drafts of the plan.

Antrim County Board GAA would also like to express our sincere thanks to Eamon Grieve County Administration Manager who acted as Secretary to the Strategic Planning Group

Finally, special thanks for the support received from Ulster Council GAA in their facilitation during the strategic planning process, in particular:
Mark Conway - Venture i Business Services,
Stephen McGeehan - Operations Manager
Ryan Feeney - Integration Development Manager

Lean ar Aghaidh

Lairdesign



Coiste Contae Aontroim CLG
Páirc Mhic Asmaint
88-104 Bóthar Bhaile Andarsan
Béal Feirste
BT11 9AN

Antrim County Board GAA
Casement Park
88-104 Andersonstown Road
Belfast
BT11 9AN

Telephone (028) 9060 5868

Fax (028) 9062 5428

Website www.antrim.gaa.ie