

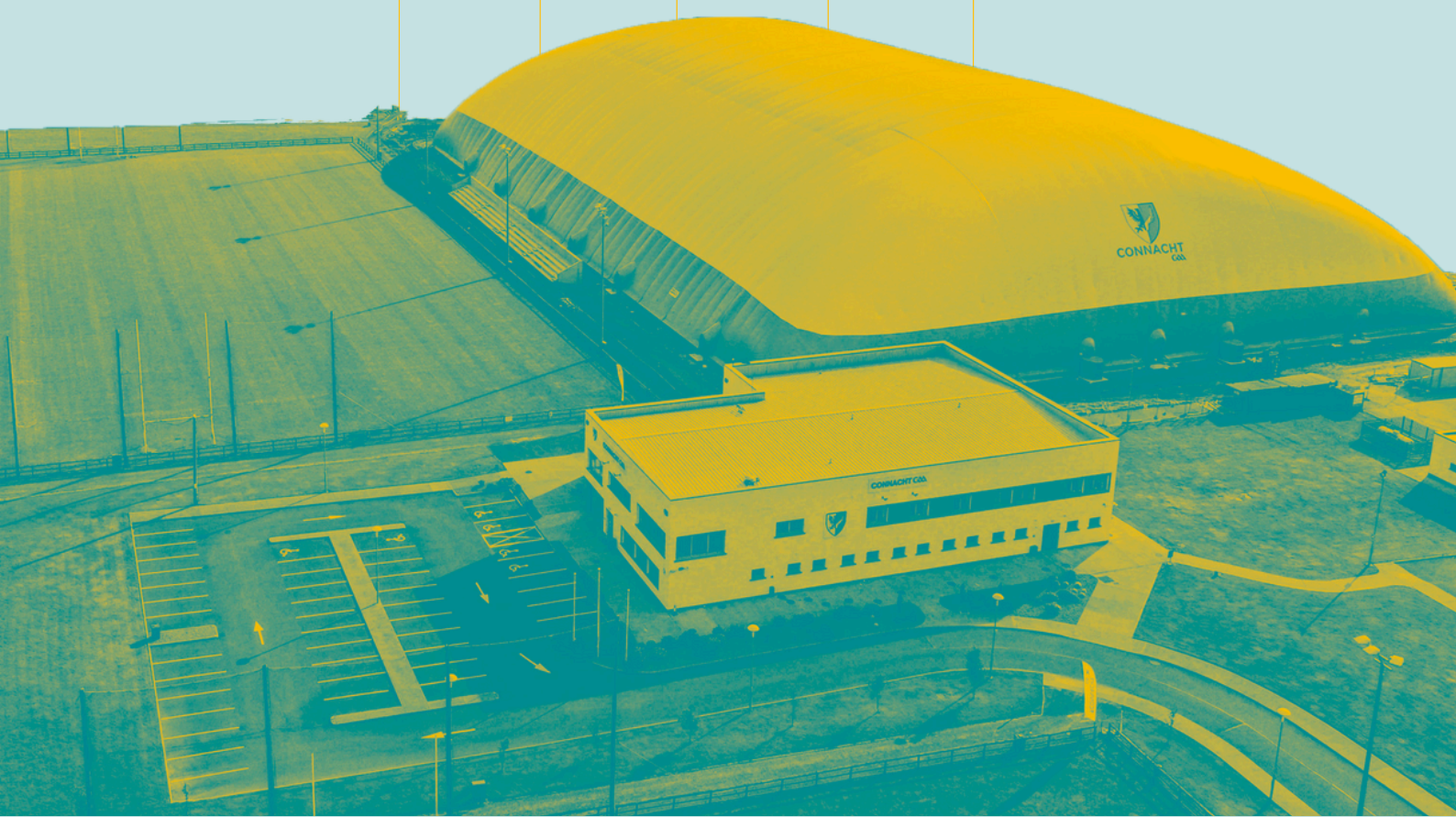


ACCESS

Achieving Circularity in Cities through
Environmental Sustainability of Sports

CONNACHT GAA CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Serve the purpose and
serve the environment, too



Connacht GAA Centre of Excellence is one of Ireland's leading sports facilities, catering to sports and recreational needs from community to elite level. The Centre of Excellence was officially opened in 2012 and the Air Dome was installed 2020; however, sustainability planning for the site began several years early – with the planting of a native tree plot and the securing of a historical heritage area of site in 2008.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Connacht GAA sought to ensure that sustainability goals were embedded in both structures and practices at the Centre of Excellence through the development of a Sustainability Roadmap for the site. Energy management was identified as a priority for the Centre from the very start – focussing on good energy management would save money, would reduce the Centre's carbon footprint and would ensure that the Centre was safe, warm and welcoming for visiting teams and for members of the community all year round. To ensure that this commitment to energy sustainability was engrained into the culture and management of the facility, the Centre's team held week Energy and Sustainability briefings, which later evolved into the Connacht GAA Biodiversity and Sustainability Committee.

The main building was designed for energy efficiency, ensuring that energy losses are kept to a minimum, and a building management system measures energy use in real time and displays this on screens throughout the building. Connacht GAA set up an SEAI Sustainability Energy Community (SEC) to support energy awareness and planning in the local and GAA community, with the Centre of Excellence at its heart. There is a 150kW solar PV installation on the CoE roof – even on a poor autumn day the CoE electricity demand is covered by this on-site generation, while a second solar PV ground array has been installed from which electricity is supplied to the national grid, supporting grid stability and earning revenue for the Centre.

There are two 22kW EV car chargers on site that are powered by site solar panels when solar power is available. All internal building lighting and external lighting in the car park and on the walkways is LED and is controlled by sensors, timers and photocells to ensure that lighting is in use only when needed.

Rainwater is harvested from the main CoE building. There is 72,000l rainwater storage on site and all toilets are fed by harvested water while low-flow valves, solenoids and sensors are installed on all tanks and toilets. The site is managed for biodiversity, in collaboration with local and national expert bodies as well as local schools and community groups. There are 25,000 native trees planted on site – 17,000 of these have been planted since 2021. The site is home to a number of beehives and to habitats for wild bees and other insects as well as to extensive biodiversity areas and there is 2.5km of community walkway around the site, with pollinator-friendly wildflowers and shrubs planted along many of its stretches.

CHALLENGE

The challenge for the Connacht GAA was to develop a new centre that would serve the needs of the local and GAA community and would showcase innovation and best practice in sports facility design while minimising any harmful impact on the natural environment. The planning for the Centre of Excellence was based on the three pillars of financial, social and environmental sustainability and the big challenge for Connacht GAA was to ensure objectives across all three pillars were included in all stages of planning and management of the Centre of Excellence.

These objectives were set internally by the Connacht GAA team, with the aim not only of futureproofing the facility and the organisation both financially and against physical and transitional climate challenges but also to reflect the values of Connacht GAA. While the project was initiated and developed by Connacht GAA, over time relationships were developed with the GAA's national Green Club Programme and with local authorities in the region, allowing for mutual supports and exchange of learning, knowledge, skills, and experiences.

LESSONS LEARNT

Measuring and Monitoring: Measuring energy and water use at the site was crucial to the Centre of Excellence's sustainability projects – understanding energy and water use enabled the team to identify where they could make savings and where to make worthwhile investment in longer-term projects.

Small Steps to Success: The sustainability achievements at the Centre of Excellence came about after careful planning and in small steps. Connacht GAA set out a long-term roadmap and started with small and simple actions like energy efficiencies and biodiversity planting and built up to more ambitious projects over time.

Partnerships: All of Connacht GAA's projects and initiatives were developed and delivered in partnership with local authorities, specialist bodies, consultant engineer and independent experts and members of the local and GAA community – without this network of partners the project would have been considerably more difficult to advance and would not have been the success it is today.

RESULTS

Significant financial savings have been made through the energy management systems, where energy use is monitored in real time and where unexpected or unnecessary energy use can be immediately identified as well as through the upgrading to LED of interior and exterior lighting and the installation of sensors and timers.

The electricity generated from the solar PV arrays means that on sunny days most of the site's electricity comes from renewable sources while the new ground array generates revenue for the site and contribute to the national supply of renewable energy.

The Centre's biodiversity projects were a great opportunity for collaboration in the community – local volunteers came out to plant the trees on site and hugely enjoyed the participation, engagement and sense of involvement at a time when the ban on indoor gatherings was having a serious impact on the health and well-being on many members of the community, while the Centre's walkways are used by members of the local community, in an area where road walking can be quite dangerous, especially in the darker winter months.

REPLICABILITY POTENTIAL

While the particular elements of the Centre's development were specific to Connacht GAA and the site, the principles and provisions are applicable to sports developments of all shapes and sizes. These include resource efficiency, water harvesting/recycling, energy monitoring and management as the basis for longer term energy investment and planning, biodiversity planning and waste management. Elements central to the success of the project that could be replicated by clubs and grounds include having sustainability as a standing item on management agendas, linking larger sustainability investment to robust business cases, planning for and involving the local community, and forging partnerships to ensure planning and development benefit from up-to-date expert advice and innovative thinking. The sustainability projects at the Connacht GAA Centre of Excellence have also inspired clubs and county boards to develop their own sustainability approaches.

Following the experiences in the Centre of Excellence, clubs around Co. Mayo have come together to set up a Mayo GAA Sustainable Energy Community (SEC), while one of the county's largest clubs, Castlebar Mitchels, along with the Mayo County Board have launched a climate action and sustainability strategy for the county's main stadium, MacHale Park. Mayo County Board have also organised a series of sustainability workshops for clubs and volunteers, delivered by expert partners in the Connacht GAA Centre of Excellence.



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This factsheet is a part of a larger collection of good practices available on the project's website

www.access-cc.eu

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The **ACCESS project** is one of the latest European projects which explores and challenges environmental sustainability and environmental management in sports. Co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, ACCESS is looking at narrowing the gaps between the current environmental performances of sport organisations, their strategies, and practices on one side and strategies and targets of their respective cities or regions with the overall objective – making these sport organisations a reference point for sustainability in sports in their countries and turning them into replicators of solutions for achieving it.



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