Title Slide

Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council

Before you start….

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Building a Swimming Pool…

A Dummies Guide!

Extremely complex projects and can involve uncharted territory

You will need strong internal expertise in Infra Guidelines & CWMF, minimum

You will probably need considerable outside expertise - just for the process

It will probably take you 7-10 years

You will probably have a big funding shortfall - construction & operation

1st Jan. 2028 – all new publicly owned buildings to be zero emissions?

Mistakes at the start could affect the viability years hence

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The Offaly / Edenderry Story

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Offaly:
4 indoor pools + 1 outdoor until Jan. 2024

Birr (1974)

Clara (1973)

Edenderry (1972 - 2024)

Tullamore (2008)

Edenderry Pool 1972 - 2024

Operated by a Community CLG – 21 staff

350 persons on lessons waiting list

19 schools utilising the facility

Offaly Co. Co. had a €3.8m LASPP refurbishment grant dating back to 2000

Many attempts to progress the refurbishment. 2023 report - €7.5m to refurbish

Pool was on a constrained site (and leased)

OCC bought a new town-centre site (RRDF funded)

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Jan. 2024 – Major Fire

April 2024: LSSIF Round 2 launched earlier than anticipated

July 2024: LSSIF application submitted – sought €11.4m. Local ‘match’ funds €4.85m

November 2024: €8.9m LSSIF grant approved

Flexibility from DTAGSM secured to utilise up to €2m of historic LASPP funding

Before

Before

After

After

Edenderry Pool – Where we are now….

November 2024: LSSIF Grant award secured

Dec 2024 – March 2026: Approval Gates for Design Stage and Pre-Tender Report

March 2026: Approval to Tender for Design Team

August 2026: Design team appointed

Estimated further 19 months to construction tender (Hoping to save time)

Look at the documents needed for the Funding Approval Gates at the very earliest stage. (Do you need to procure expertise?)

Planning Your Swimming Pool Project

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Planning Your Pool

Having the right Team

Project Manager

Strong Procurement, Infrastructure Guidelines & CWMF expertise

Engineering expertise

Quantity Surveying support desirable

Financial appraisal support critical

Legal advice

Energy and sustainability expertise

Do you need External Expertise?

Business Case specialists

Procurement expert

Energy, sustainability & building performance

A LSSIF application will require:

Business Case | Economic Appraisal | Financial Analysis
Affordability Analysis | Cost Plan for the Delivery Phase
Project Execution Plan Project Programme

MCA (if >€20m) | Risk Management Plan

Operational Plan | Environment & Climate Goals Strategy

Statement of Environmental Commitment, KPI's Monitoring protocol

Similar Access Requirement

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Planning Your Pool – Swim Ireland Directory

Facility and Infrastructure Support

Leisure Architects

Leisure Consultants

Project & Procurement Management

Leisure Contractors / Builder

Pool & Plant Room Suppliers, Installation / Maintenance Contractors

Pool Plant Designers and Plant Room Advisors

Chemical Suppliers & Microbiology Water Testing

Energy & Sustainability Consultants

Modular Facilities / Pool Structures

Leisure Management Advice and Operation Models

Equipment Providers

Disability & Accessibility Equipment

Education & Training

Industry Bodies and Organisations

Locker and Washrooms

Pool Alarms and Access Control

Learn to Swim Management Systems

Drowning Detection Systems

Planning Your Pool – Guidance

Swim Ireland – Infrastructure Hub

***Some* key guidance**:

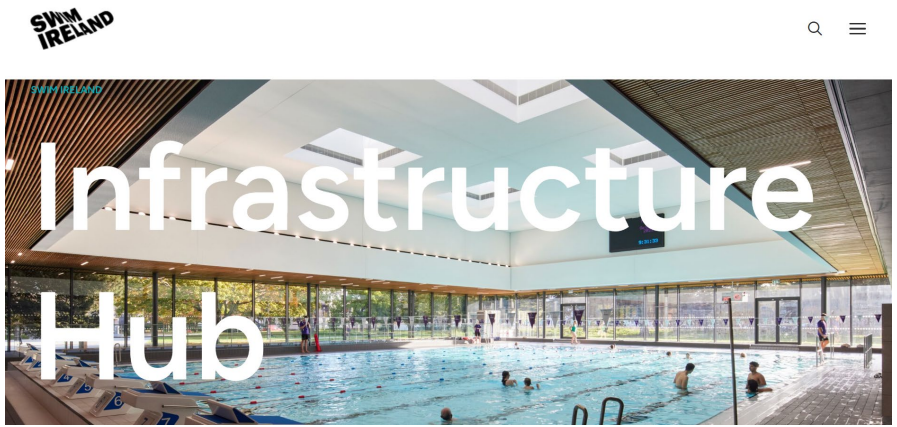
Swim Ireland Eco Pools Report 2024

Swim Ireland Pool Innovation Report 2022

Sport England Swimming Pools Design Guidance (10.3 Design Considerations)

Sport England Affordable Community Swimming Pools

IAKS (International Federation for Sports & Leisure Facilities) “Getting Your Public Pool Facility Right” 2023



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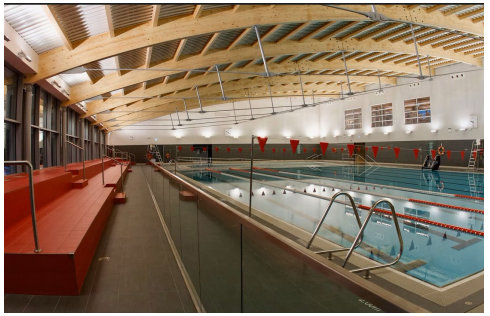
Planning Your Pool

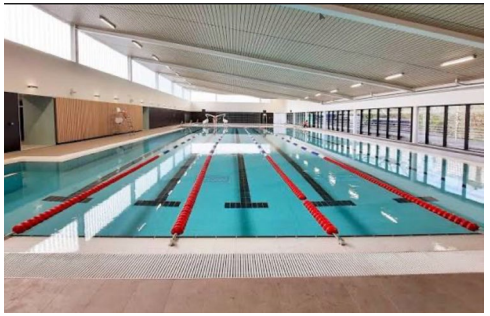
Learning from Others

New-build precedents in Ireland are limited.

Review recent projects such as:

- Lough Lannagh Leisure Centre, Castlebar (2019)
- Aura Lucan, South Dublin County Council (2026)
- Dunmanway upgrade (2017)
- Irishtown (Ongoing)





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Your New Pool…

Key Initial Questions

New build or refurbishment?
Community, Competition or Regional facility?
Proposed Operating Model?
Facility mix (Gym? Studios? Hydrotherapy? Café? Sports Hall? Outdoor Sports?
Canoeing? Water-polo?
Heating System / NZEB & Building Comfort

These are all critical inputs to the business case from the earliest stage

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Your New Pool…

Who will run it? (Operational Model)

Local Authority directly operated

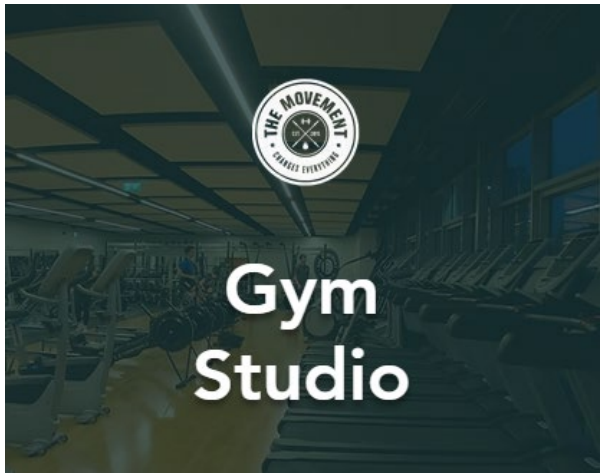
Community CLG or Trust

Outsourced operator - Management licence

Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Hybrid? eg. Lough Lannagh Castlebar.

Swim Ireland Study ongoing….



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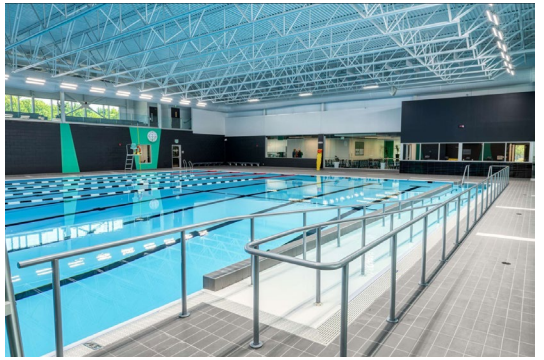
Planning Your Pool

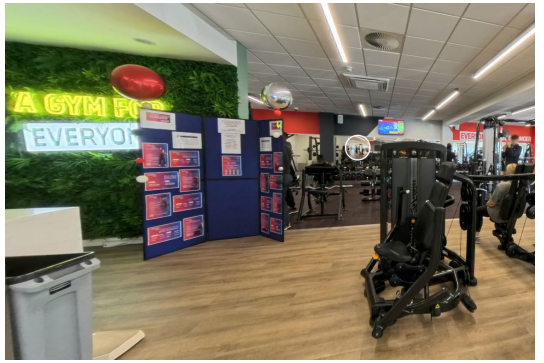
Why the Operational Model Matters

-Facility mix and complexity
-Operational Philosophy & Programming model
-Staffing levels
-Pricing strategy
-Viability & long-term sustainability

For refurbishments of older community run facilities - will the original model be able to run a vastly more complex new development?

Concerns re. multiple CLGs associated with Local Authorities





Your New Pool…

Understand (and Demonstrate) the Need

Review the Swim Ireland Gap Analysis Report (2025)

Undertake supply and demand analysis

Assess catchment population and drive times

Examine competing facilities, including hotel pools

Consider future demand, not just current demand

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Your New Pool…

Consider Revenue Streams

Pool ‘losses’ are often offset by gyms etc.

Consider how many of these can operate concurrently?

- Learn to Swim programmes (Schools & Private)
- School swimming
- Casual swimming (incl. families / weekends / school holidays)
- Clubs and training
- Wellness and recovery services
- Gym memberships & PAYG
- Group exercise classes
- Competitions and events
- Private hire / bespoke pool and dry facility sessions
- Café

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Your New Pool…

Some Key Considerations for the Business Plan

Robustly testing viability

- The Build & Priorities *vs* the Budget
- The Operational Model / mix of elements

Revenue Projections, test multiple scenarios

Trends…. Demand in 10, 20 years?

Are we underbuilding or overbuilding?

Major lifecycle costs are inevitable

Pricing model. Most pools ~€10 per swim. Family of 4 €20. Annual 2+2 €1000 (city and rural samples). Munich – Average = ~€5.80

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Your New Pool…

Business case must look well beyond the initial operating years

Pool ‘kit’ is extremely sophisticated & expensive

Remember the LA will probably own the facility, so when a major break happens, storm damage etc….

Extreme caution regarding future viability

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Your New Pool…

Making the Business Case Stronger

Test the Demand? - Swim Ireland's Pop-Up Pool

Community consultation

Club engagement

School engagement

National Governing Body consultation

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Your New Pool…

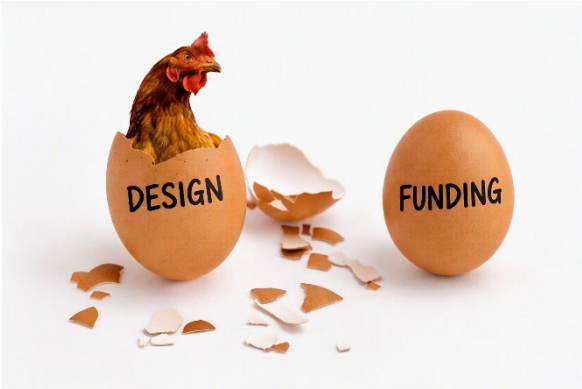
What will the Funding Model be?

Design first and seek funding later?

Wait for a funding call to support design costs? (LSSIF 2024 up to 30% of design costs).

Funding opportunities may only arise every few years

Design costs can represent 8-10% of project value



TOP TIP

Whichever avenue you choose, follow the Infrastructure Guidelines from the outset!

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Your New Pool…

Potential Sources of Funding

Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF)

RRDF / URDF / Town & Village Renewal

Development Contributions (Ringfence!)

Local Property Tax allocations (OCC secured 25% ‘increase’ every year since 2020 – strictly ringfenced for community & regeneration projects)

Loan (Revenue budget or company loan)

Sponsorship, Philanthropy, naming rights?

SEAI - grants

Explore every possible funding source and try package them together.

Your New Pool…

If going for Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF)

Start the Business Case and the Application very early
Develop strong partnerships – especially with National Governing Bodies
Sharing of facilities is very much encouraged by LSSIF
Be aware that grant assistance typically seems to be 50-55%

Key Themes That Score Highly (I have amalgamated some).
Increasing sporting participation and quality (1,300 / 10,000)
Sharing – communities / clubs / NGB's (1,300 / 10,000)
Technical Merits and Infrastructure Guidelines Checklist (1,000 / 10,000)
Level of own funding (800 / 10,000)
Environmental sustainability (1,000 / 10,000)
Local Authority's Priority (900 per LA)
NGB's priority (900 per NGB)

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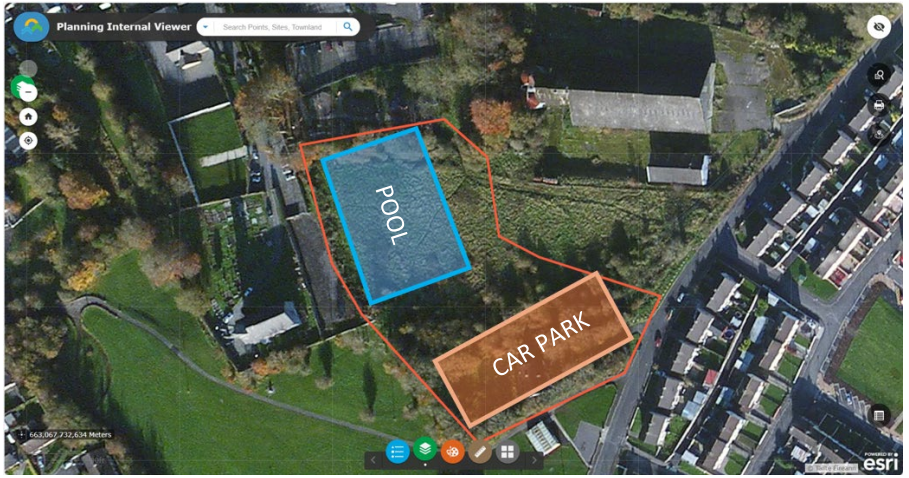
Your New Pool…

Site due diligence



Will a pool you have seen elsewhere fit?

Ecology & Archaeology

Ground conditions above and below the surface
Utilities, Water and wastewater capacity

Flood risk

Planning constraints

Site ownership requirements

TOP TIP

Early surveys reduce risk, avoid surprises, allow mitigation to be incorporated into design & protects project timelines.

Developing a clear design brief

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What are your Red Lines / ‘Non-Negotiables?

Caution – they may become ‘negotiable’ when you see the price!

Edenderry Brief

- A focal point for the town and the Blundell masterplan
- Strong integration with the surrounding park, public realm, walking routes
- A ‘destination’ facility for swimming, fitness, recovery and community use
- 8 lane FINA standard pool with inclusive and accessible design
- Learning pool (with lanes)
- Hydrotherapy suite (hot & cold).
- Gym & Studio space
- An affordable community-focused operating model
- Design a sports hall even though budget may not allow for its initial construction.

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The Pool Itself – Fundamental Decisions

Above-ground or below-ground construction?

Competition, community or leisure pool? (or a mixture?)

Local catchment or regional destination?

Stand-alone pool complex or part of a wider sports campus?

Energy source

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Pool Size & Configuration

Main pool and learner pool, or a combined water space?

Number of lanes required?

Pool dimensions and depth profiles? (eg. For different uses). Moveable floor?

Accessibility features and assisted access?

Flexibility for different user groups?

Strategic Thinking

Maximise usable water space

Design for multiple simultaneous activities

Future-proof wherever possible

Build flexibility into the facility

4 lanes. Brook Leisure Centre, Belfast

5 lanes. Sudbad, Munich

6 lanes + Learners. K-Leisure, Naas

6 lanes + Toddlers + Learners. Shoreline, Greystones

8 lanes + Learners. Aura, Dundalk

Does bigger mean costlier to run?

Caution – you will have sleepness nights over this!

Larger pools = higher capital costs.. But not always proportionately higher operating costs

More water space = greater flexibility and potentially concurrent uses

Potentially greater income – however does it align with the philosophy?

Movable floors and booms can maximise pool utilisation

The right-sized pool may be more affordable in the long term than a smaller pool that limits income and programming opportunities.

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A ‘Secret Shopper’ exercise is really useful.

What would you be looking for?

Facility Mix

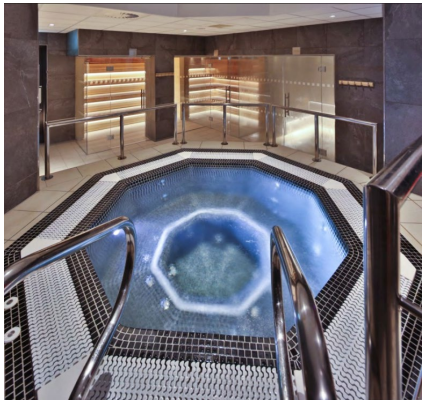
‘Feel’ as a customer

Practicabilities as a pool owner / potential landlord

Operational best practices

Good & bad examples

Wheelchair & Buggy Park- Southlakes, Craigavon



Berwick Leisure Centre, Northumberland

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‘Virtual Tours’ are very helpful

Rainham Swimming Pool, Havering, London

Southlakes Leisure Centre, Craigavon, N.I.

Birr Leisure Centre, Offaly

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Some things not to forget!

Coach parking, Age-Friendly parking

Excellent staff welfare – may need to be employer ‘of choice’

Sufficient storage based on the facility mix

Estimate of demand / preferences in in 20 yrs time? Expansion opportunities?

Flexibility in changing rooms / village.

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One final request…..

Please, please require sensible-sized lockers!

Tendering for a Design Team

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Some of our learnings..

- Do you want an Architect / Engineer / Specialist Led Design Team?
- Ensure the tender quality criteria requires significant pool experience / working with pool specialists, M&E etc. and also projects of a similar nature and scale
- Strong PSDP experience, Design Certification, BCMS and now BIM.
- Put in place a strong Project Board for conflict resolution
- Consider retaining your Business Plan Consultants to advise through the design process, test design decisions against operational assumptions & ensure affordability and viability remain central
- Consider Climate Officer and planner on the team / steering group
- Consider liaising with AGS Crime Prevention Unit through the design process

Edenderry Design Tender

Two Stage Single Party Framework Agreement

1: SAQ

Architect (Project Lead); Mech. & Elec.; Civils & Structural; Pool Specialist; QS

2: Quality & Price: 70% quality, 30% price

Design Team appointed for Stages 1 to 2b initially (up to planning and detailed design)
Option to then engage re. appointment for stages 3-5. (Subject to Approval Gate 3).

ITT Quality document stated: "*sketches / diagrams / site strategy drawings can be used in demonstrating the response to this criterion*"

Potentially very relevant in the context of use of AI for the output rather than as a tool.

The Construction Tender

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Construction Tender

Lessons Learned from other projects

Strict compliance to FoT doc

Don’t rush detailed design / issue of tenders – avoidance of changes later

Very detailed pricing document / BOQ

Realistic contract period

Agree procedures for change orders

Strong Employers Representative

Takeaways

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Takeaways

Build the right internal and external team early

Consider the preferred operational model early

Develop the Business Case early

Align the project to funding criteria

Think about operation and maintenance as much as construction

A successful swimming pool project is not about building a facility. It is about creating a financially sustainable, community-focused asset that can thrive for decades

Thank you

Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council