



# Athlone Boat Club Strategic Plan

*Rowing in a New Direction*



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## **1. Background & Context**

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Athlone Boat Club has been in existence since 1835. During this period it has a long tradition of making an active contribution to the community of Athlone, supporting people development, promoting physical activity, contributing to the local economy and animating the River Shannon.

Despite the club's rich history, it presently finds itself at a crossroads in terms of having to make some key decisions, which will shape the long-term future of the club. Such decisions derive from a necessity to invest in the club's infrastructure, financial constraints, a more mature committee membership profile, fragmented approaches to membership recruitment, heightened competition for membership retention and recruitment with other sports, restricted coaching capacity and a lack of long-term strategic direction. In response to this, the club has proactively developed this new strategy, which will act as a roadmap for the future development of the club. This strategy sets out an exciting and ambitious blueprint for the future of Athlone Boat Club, which will enable the club to build on its solid foundations and to grow in a sustainable way. In implementing this strategy, Athlone Boat Club also recognises the continued role that it will play in shaping peoples lives, improving health, providing opportunity for participation, promoting social integration and adding value to the local community.



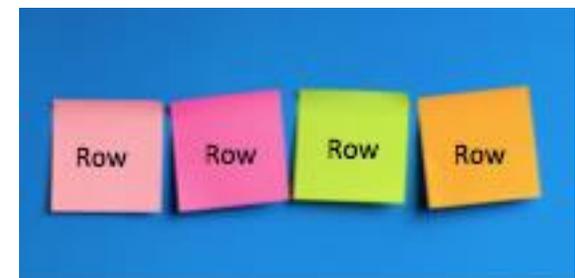
## **2. Strategy Inception & Process**

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The preparation of this strategy emanated from a desire on the part of the club's committee and members to develop a framework that would guide the future direction of the club, enabling it to safeguard its existence and to realise its full potential as a recreational, cultural, community, historical and social asset of Athlone town and the wider midlands area.

The strategy establishes a blueprint for the long-term development of the club, outlining a set of strategic themes, which will guide the future direction of the club. This is supported by the provision of a concise series of actions, which are both systematic and intuitive, thereby allowing the club to adopt a focused approach in the implementation of key deliverables with defined timeframes.

In preparing this strategy, a club workshop event was held on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016, where through dialogue, debate, membership feedback and the carrying out of a SWOT analysis, the current context, the challenges and the aspirations for the club were revealed. This process and the data it generated served to frame the strategy, with consensus obtained on articulating a clear vision, a series of objectives, the preparation of a club value system, and the identification of key actions with defined timeframes and responsibility.



### **3. Vision & Mission**

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Athlone Boat Club is steeped in tradition and represents an integral element of the town's history, offering an invaluable source of recreation and refuge, in a club environment that fosters an ethos of community and a sense of social enjoyment. With its riverside location, it offers people the opportunity to engage with the water in a more intimate way, helping to animate the river Shannon, whilst allowing people to see the town and its environment from a completely different viewpoint. Much has been achieved by the club, but in looking to the future, opportunity exists to capitalise on its distinctive setting, strong traditions and dedicated membership base, in order to develop the club further, allowing it to fulfil its true potential. In seeking to achieve this, the overarching vision for Athlone Boat Club is as follows:

*"To create a rowing community that is family-friendly and inclusive, where people are welcomed and valued, where the club's past is celebrated, where health and well-being are promoted, and where a rowing experience is provided that is people centered, fun and participative".*

In support of achieving this vision, the club has embraced the following mission statement:

*"To establish and maintain a club culture founded on the principles of friendship, enjoyment, team spirit and lifetime participation".*



## **4. Challenges**

## 4. Challenges

Offering competitive rowing to junior and masters age groups respectively, the club's membership has remained relatively consistent over the past 5 years, ranging in size from between 70 to 100 members. Notwithstanding this relatively stable membership base, a series of challenges exist for Athlone Boat Club, which at a higher level can be categorised as follows:

- An immediate requirement to upgrade the clubhouse and to safeguard against future flooding
- A continual necessity to invest in new infrastructure and equipment
- Funding sources are limited and short-term
- Failure to adopt modern communication methods and channels that will enhance the club's brand and supports recruitment
- Focus placed on competitive rowing with no recreational rowing provided
- Long serving club committee with a restricted age profile
- Limited responsibility and volunteerism for organising regattas and events
- Constraints relating to existing coaching capacity
- Lack of a longer-term strategy for the future development of the club
- Restricted partnerships and sponsorship opportunities
- Ad hoc approach to membership recruitment and loss of members at college stage of life

## **5. Responding to the Challenge**

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In response to the challenges that the club faces, Athlone Boat Club is committed to making the changes required in order to achieve its full potential. Integral to this, is the establishment of a club value system, as values help to shape the vision that Athlone Boat Club wants to cultivate. For Athlone Boat Club, its core values define the identity of the club and how it wishes to be perceived both internally and externally. Importantly, Athlone Boat Club's values are both timeless and sustainable, which enables them to guide future decision making as part of the longer-term development of the club. In doing so, the club will overcome its challenges, enabling it to succeed in achieving its vision and implementing its objectives. In line with its vision, Athlone Boat Club's core values are realistic and human centered. They are as follows:

- Have fun and put a smile on peoples faces
- Build a community and team spirit where people are welcomed and valued
- Create a club culture that is family friendly, open and inclusive
- Embrace change and be open minded
- Be humble, passionate and determined



## **6. Delivering the Vision**

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The implementation of this strategy is the means by which Athlone Boat Club can grow in a sustainable manner, optimising the potential opportunities that exist and providing an enhanced offering to its members, all within the context of the longer-term development of the club. In delivering this strategy and achieving its vision, a series of strategic themes have been devised, from which, specific and focused objectives have been developed. These strategic themes are as follows:

1. Physical Infrastructure & Equipment
2. Finance
3. Marketing & Communications
4. Governance
5. Club Development
6. Social Development

Each of these themes strategic objectives and their associated actions are outlined and discussed in section 7 below. In meeting these objectives, it is recommended that ownership be assigned to 6 teams, comprising of club members ranging in size of between 3 – 5 members, with the larger team of 5 people designated for the implementation of the Club Development actions. Upon assignment of club members to the relevant teams, regular progress update meetings should take place between all club members involved. It is recommended that these update meetings take place every 2 months and are chaired by a designated official within the club.

## **7. Strategic Themes**

## 7. Strategic Themes

### 7.1. Strategic Theme 1: Physical Infrastructure & Equipment

Strategic objective: Develop and invest in infrastructure and equipment that will support the club's longer-term development.

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Devise and implement an action plan for the upgrading of the Club's existing club house	Any plan should be based on the longer-term interests of the club. This will require engagement with both the local authority executive and elected representatives	6 Months
2.	Identify existing and future equipment requirements and prepare a programme of investment	This programme should provide a longer-term and incremental investment plan that looks at the different financing options available e.g. hire purchase, rental etc. This programme should be reviewed and cross-referenced with membership numbers on an annual basis	6 Months & On-going

## 7.2. Strategic Theme 2: Finance

Strategic objective: Put in place the finances that will support the club's development allowing it to grow and succeed.

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Explore and develop new sources of funding that will support the club's longer-term development	All existing revenue sources should be reviewed, whilst potential new revenue streams such as private sponsorship, hosting of events and state funding supports need to be thoroughly investigated. In conducting this review, best practice funding models should be looked at in both rowing and other sports.	9 Months and On-going
2.	Identify and engage with local companies in the midlands area for financial support as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes	Identify ways that Athlone Boat Club can meet the CSR objectives of local companies; establish key contacts and build relationships with relevant companies and organisations.	6 Months and On-going

### 7.3. Strategic Theme 3: Marketing & Communications

Strategic objective: Establish a brand identity for Athlone Boat Club that is modern, inclusive, family friendly and fun.

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Prepare a new communications and marketing plan to enhance the club's brand and to support membership recruitment	This new strategy should be interactive, embracing social media and modern communication tools. The strategy should be reflective of the club's target audience. Consideration should be given for the development of a brand tagline that supports the club's vision	6 Months and On-going
2.	Upgrade and modernise the club's website	The club's website should be interactive and provide for up-to-date information	6 Months and On-going
3.	Establish club communication and social media guidelines	These guideline should outline the club's policies for when communicating on behalf of the club and when using social media	6 Months and On-going
4.	Identify a club communication spokesperson(s) and establish contacts with key media stakeholders	Select an appropriate club spokesperson. Forge and build relationships with key media stakeholders in the area	On-going

#### 7.4. Strategic Theme 4: Governance

Strategic objective: Establish a modern governance structure that promotes integrity and ethical behaviour, giving a voice to all generations within the club.

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Seek to establish a club committee with a broader age profile	Seek nominations from club members within different age cohorts for participation at committee level. The committee members term should evolve on a regular basis	3 Months and On-going
2.	Explore the feasibility of employing someone part-time to manage the club's operations	Discuss the potential of identifying, employing and financing someone on a part-time capacity to manage the club's regulatory and operational requirements	6 Months
3.	Establish a separate club committee to plan and manage the introduction of recreational rowing at the club	This committee should prepare a plan that outlines the phased introduction of recreational rowing at the club	9 months and On-going

## 7.5. Strategic Theme 5: Club Development

Strategic objective: To support the longer-term sustainable development of the club, allowing it to meet its strategic objectives

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Prepare a plan for the phased introduction of recreational rowing, in tandem with the continued development of competitive rowing	This plan should have due regard to the upgrading of existing club facilities and the provision of new equipment, as well as all financing proposals associated with same. This plan should be aligned with the club's communications strategy	9 Months and On-going
2.	Formulate a club coaching action plan	This should provide for an enlarged coaching capacity within the club and should include annual targets for an increase in club coaching personnel	9 Months and On-going
3.	Prepare a membership recruitment plan	This should focus on membership retention and expansion, identifying membership constraints and outlining remedial measures	9 Months and On-going
4.	Develop Club Partnerships	Identify and establish partnerships with other clubs and key stakeholders e.g. Athlone Institute of Technology	3 Months and On-going

## 7.6. Strategic Theme 6: Social Development

Strategic objective: To promote and provide opportunities for social interaction and the creation of a community ethos within the club.

No.	Action	Notes	Timeframe
1	Develop and organise an annual calendar of club events	Develop a programme of events that are inclusive and family friendly	6 Months and On-going
2.	Broaden responsibility within the club and promote wider volunteerism in organising regattas and events	Identify club members to be involved and to be mentored in organising the club's annual regatta	6 Months and On-going
3.	Pilot the running of a regatta in partnership with another rowing club	Identify and approach another rowing club with the intention of collaborating on a joint rowing event. This will build relationships and allow other club members to experience what's involved in running a rowing event	12 months and subject to review

## **8. Milestones & Success Factors**

## 8. Milestones & Success Factors

In order to ensure that the objectives of the strategy are met and progress is being made in delivering the club's overall vision, all of the teams assembled to deliver the 6 strategic objectives should establish milestones for assigned deliverables, which should be agreed and regularly reviewed at the update meetings, as referred to in section 7 of this strategy.

In support of the above, the following factors will be critical to achieving successful strategy implementation:

1. Committee support
2. Active club-wide engagement and participation
3. Club communication
4. On-going monitoring and review of strategic objectives
5. Leadership and commitment from club members

## 9. Appendices

## 9.1. Appendix 1: Strategic Themes Delivery Structure

In delivering the strategic themes, it is recommended that 6 teams be established, comprising of between 3 to 5 team members. Each team will be responsible for the delivery of one of the 6 core objectives of the strategy. In the interests of monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the deliverables, regular progress update meetings should take place between all club members involved. It is recommended that these update meetings take place every 2 months and are chaired by a designated official within the club. The proposed structure for the theme delivery is illustrated below:



## 9.2. Appendix 2: Club Coaching Plan – Basic Principles

In order to future-proof the club and the development of its rowers, an enlarged coaching capacity is required, therefore a club coaching plan should be devised that sets annual targets for an increase in club coaching personnel. A longer-term perspective should be taken on this, with the identification of new coaching candidates and subsequent training occurring on an annual basis. In effect, a pipeline of new club coaches should be developed, who are trained to cater for different age groups, as well as both competitive and recreational rowing respectively.

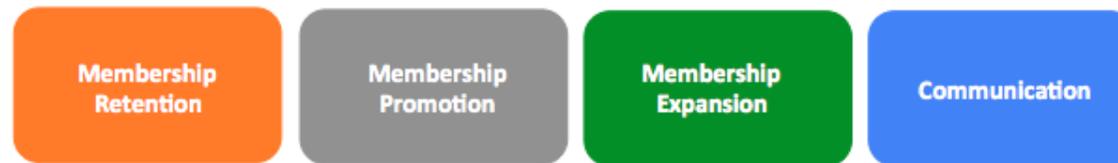
In addition to the above, the club should capitalise on the existing experience within the club and develop robust training plans that cover the following key areas:



In support of this, upskilling of coaches in the aforementioned areas should occur on a regular basis, with opportunities afforded to club members to develop themselves and to make an active contribution to the club.

### 9.3. Appendix 3: Membership Recruitment Plan – Basic Principles

As alluded to in section 7 of this report, this plan should focus on membership retention and expansion, identifying membership constraints and outlining remedial measures. In doing so, due consideration should be given to the formation of partnerships and the holding of information sessions with schools, colleges, sports centres and other clubs in the area. The Recruitment Plan should address the following:



Given the challenges surrounding membership retention, particularly associated with members of college-going age, efforts should be made to forge partnerships with rowing clubs in the major cities that are home to colleges, whilst the principle of a potential partnership with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) should also be explored. The establishment of a partnership with AIT would enable students attending the college to avail of the training facilities offered by Athlone Boat Club. Allied to this, opportunity also exists to explore the potential of rowing scholarships with AIT, should a successful partnership be formed with the college.



## **Athlone Boat Club**

## **Strategic Plan**

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