

20 November 2020

To: Joe Fitzpatrick, Minister for Sport
From: Mike Ferguson, Chairman of Scottish Ice Rink Association
Bruce Crawford, CEO of Scottish Curling
cc: Local MSP of each ice rink and sportscotland

Ice Rinks in Scotland are being frozen out

There are currently 27 ice rinks in Scotland, from Inverness to Stranraer. Ice rinks accommodate the sports of curling, ice hockey and ice skating, from novice to Olympic and Paralympic standards. A list of rinks with details and background information is provided in the appendices to this letter.

Recent research shows that ice rinks contribute over £10m per annum to the national economy in Scotland. The sector employs around 280 people in a range of specialist technical, hospitality and administrative roles. Most ice rinks have been grateful to have benefitted from the government furlough scheme for at least some of their staff but this is only a small proportion of the operating costs of ice rinks and with a predicted drop of at least 50% in turnover this season we are seeking financial support for our ice rinks to survive.

Implementation of covid restrictions to group activity has forced closures. Fifteen ice rinks have not opened since March 2020 and three have just announced that they are to close for the rest of the season so not reopen for another 11 months in October 2021. They will have made a loss this season and virtually exhausted their financial reserves. If Scotland wants to continue to have curling, ice skating and ice hockey for future generations and for our best players in all ice sports to be competitive on the world stage the sector needs support.

Our request to Scottish Government is twofold:

- Provide a support package of £2.5m to cover the irrecoverable revenue already lost this season for the independent ice rinks, not supported by their local authority.
- Support **sportscotland** to redefine indoor non-contact activity that is allowed in level 3 to include adult non-contact sport in groups where social distancing is followed.

We hope our request can be supported and can provide more detail if required.

Yours sincerely



Mike Ferguson
Chairman, SIRA



Bruce Crawford
CEO, Scottish Curling

Appendix 1. List of Ice rinks with opening status

*The column on the right hand side indicates the independent/private rinks that do not benefit from direct support from their Local Authority or Leisure Trust. The funding request is only in relation to these facilities.

Curling/Mixed Use Rink			
<i>Rink</i>	<i>Owner/Operator</i>	<i>Open/Closed</i>	<i>Included in request *</i>
Auchenharvies	Local Authority	Closed	
Ayr	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Border (Kelso)	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Curl Aberdeen	CASC	Open	Yes
Dewars (Perth)	LA Leisure Trust	Closed	
Dumfries Curling	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Dundee	Local Authority	Closed	
Fife (Kirkcaldy)	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Forfar	Privately owned	Closed	Yes
Galleon (Kilmarnock)	Local Authority	Closed	
Greenacres	Privately owned	Closed	Yes
Kinross	Community Trust	Closed	Yes
Inverness	Community Trust	Open	Yes
Lanarkshire, Hamilton	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Lockerbie	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Moray (Elgin)	LA Leisure Trust	Closed	
Murrayfield (Edinburgh)	Members' Company	Closed	Yes
Olympia (East Kilbride)	Local Authority	Closed	
Peak (Stirling)	LA Leisure Trust	Closed	
Peak (NCA)	LA Leisure Trust	Performance only	
Stranraer	Privately owned	Closed	Yes
Waterfront, Greenock	Local Authority	Closed	
Ice Hockey/Skating Rinks			
Braehead Arena	Privately owned	Mothballed	
Dumfries Ice Bowl - Arena	Local Authority	Closed	
Linx (Aberdeen)	Local Authority	Closed	
Murrayfield Skating	Privately owned	Closed	Yes
TimeCapsule, Coatbridge	LA Leisure Trust	Closed	

Appendix 2. Supporting information

Ice rinks generally operate during the winter season from September to April so the businesses are geared to generating revenues during that time and they close for the warmer summer months for maintenance of buildings, refrigeration plant and equipment.

Ice rinks were forced to close from mid March until the 30th August 2020 and many were able to open around their normal opening dates in September and October as planned but all but two have now been forced to close to the public, as local restrictions and latterly Local Protection Levels, made their business unviable.

With the current restrictions in Level 3 preventing adult group activity, this limits curling to under 18s (making up less than 7% of curlers) and groups of 6 people from 2 households. Adult games usually involve 8 people from 8 households so the sport is not able to continue in its normal format and while some ice rinks have attempted to stay open for under 18s and household groups this has not been financially viable to cover running costs and they have opted to close.

Ice rinks have been classified throughout the COVID frameworks as indoor sports courts. However, it is often overlooked that the baseline cost of opening an ice rink and installing the ice is on average £10,000 due to the need to chill the floor first then gradually build up the base layers of ice, then paint, markings and more ice on top. The £10,000 is a "sunk cost" that needs to be recovered from ice fees, spread throughout the season. Daily energy costs to maintain the ice, range from £300-£2,000 per day. As a result, when group activity is prohibited, the ice rinks have to make a decision as to how long they can afford to remain open without generating income. Even then, the refrigeration plant can't just be switched off as the melted ice and paint must be properly removed and clean up takes a week with multiple staff followed by a further two weeks to get the ice back again at such time as the restrictions are lifted or the ice rink management deem it sensible to reinstall the ice.

Many ice rinks in the central belt have already stated they will not risk reinstalling their ice until January at the earliest as they cannot take on the financial risk at this time as they may not survive having to close down again. For those ice rinks that have opted to melt their ice due to uncertainty on when they will move to Level 2, reopening will of course involve an additional £10,000 expenditure to install the ice which many ice rinks will simply struggle to afford.

Not all of the ice rinks managed to secure government funding at the start of Lockdown, although many did. More recently, ice rinks have faced challenges accessing the Business Hardship Grant and in Level 3 ice rinks are ineligible for the closure grant despite it being financially unviable to remain open. We believe that £4.3m of revenue will be lost across the sector and as local authorities move from Level 2 to Level 3 and back again ice rinks face additional costs to reinstate their ice. We are asking the Scottish Government to help the independent ice rinks by providing direct support to save our ice rinks from permanent closure and allow as many ice rinks as possible to be able to afford to reopen again this season to serve their communities.

The demographic of ice rink users ranges from skaters starting age 5 through to curlers remaining active into their 80's. The curling demographic is older with Scottish Curling's average age of members being 63. The sport has great mental health benefits as it is indoor over winter at rinks, tackling social isolation by providing sport and hospitality under one roof, often the rink is a heartbeat of a local rural or suburban community. During the recovery from the pandemic, facilities like ice rinks will be vital to communities and offer older members of our community an opportunity to stay active in a safe and social environment.

Curling is a sport where social distancing is relatively easy given the space available to each participant and the protocols we have put in place mitigate all identified risks of close contact with others. We are lobbying **sportscotland** for the relaxation of the 'group activity' definition that is preventing traditional curling with 8 people per sheet continuing.

Our ice rinks have invested in measures to make them COVID safe:

- creating one-way systems
- wearing face coverings while not participating in exercise
- adapting rules to maintain 2m distancing e.g. reducing from 2 sweepers to just 1
- reduced number of sessions per day to allow sanitisation of venue and equipment
- use of bubble system to avoid contact between groups
- physical distancing signage on and off the ice
- increased ventilation, fresh air intake and air filtration
- bookings through clubs in advance for all sessions, avoiding cash handling
- having trained COVID officers at every facility and every club

Appendix 3. Additional information about curling

Curling is Scotland's indigenous winter sport, with around 11,000 regular curlers (members of Scottish Curling). The sport introduces on average 4,000 school pupils per season to the sport. A further 3,000 people, on average, try the game for the first time every year through the Try Curling initiative.

Curling can be played from the age of 8-80's and by people with disabilities too. It is known to benefit physical and mental health and provides social engagement for older people who might otherwise face isolation. It is a sport with a rich heritage invented in Scotland and has high standards of governance as measured by sportscotland.

The sport has been successful at Olympic, World and European level over the past decade. In 2019 Team Scotland were World Wheelchair Championship Silver medallists, World Junior Men Bronze medallists as well as European Women's Silver Medallists and European Men's Bronze medallists.