

# SNOWSPORT ENGLAND

## Whole sport plan 2010-2014

Comments from Alan Jones on the Funding Bid 2009-2013 to Sport England  
to be borne in mind for the Forward Plan 2010-2014

### General Comments

#### 1. Presentation

1.1 Please explain acronyms in a glossary or at least write them in full with the initials in brackets when first used, for the benefit of those from outside the Snowsport England (SSE).

1.2 It would be helpful in a document of this kind if every paragraph were numbered.

1.3 Be sure that all disciplines are taken into account where appropriate.

#### 2. Key issues

2.1 It seems to me that there are two key issues arising from the Funding Bid which need to be addressed in the Forward Plan 2010-2014 as many of the objectives depend on them.

- **The Need for a Facilities Strategy**
- **The need for an attractive package of membership benefits.**

##### 2.1.1 Facilities Strategy

2.1.1.1 This must show not only what is needed but also how it could be achieved (with the help of appropriate partners).

2.1.1.2 The greatest need is for significant more and better quality local facilities, particularly in large conurbations

- Greater London has only one facility
- Merseyside has only one very inadequate facility\*

2.1.1.3 Most registered performers live close to good facilities suggesting that each new good facility would soon increase the number of participants at all levels in its neighbourhood.

2.1.1.4 There seems to be an inappropriate assumption that all future facilities will be indoor snow which would not be economically viable in most cases.

2.1.1.5 More and better facilities are needed if Clubs are to have sufficient access to slope time for serious training.

\* The Borough of Halton has recently been made a part of Merseyside which strictly puts Runcorn Ski Centre in Merseyside, but for the practical purposes of SSE it is best still regarded as part of Cheshire.

## 2.1.2 An attractive membership package

2.1.2.1 Lessons need to be learned from the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) on setting up an attractive membership package without which many of the objectives in the Funding Bid will not be achieved.

2.1.2.2 A significant increase in Individual Membership should be possible with an attractive package of benefits.

2.1.2.3 There needs also to be attractive benefits for Clubs and other corporate groups of snowsport enthusiasts including Schools, Higher Education (HE) and the Services.

2.1.2.4 It is particularly important for Nordic to integrate the Services better as most cross country skiers, particularly at higher levels, are in the Army. Service personnel have periods at home and abroad. Nordic members (individual and Club) have few benefits from SSE at present.

2.1.2.5 A better membership structure was recommended by the Membership and Voting Working Group during the 'Modernisation' debate which could be applied to SSE.

### **3. Other important issues**

3.1 There is a need to improve communications so as to get over the public misconception of skiing as an elitist leisure pursuit for winter holidays only. It is a serious sport providing an activity for life and requiring skill which can be developed at home based facilities.

3.2 The Coaching Scheme needs to be aligned with Sports Coach UK (SCUK) as soon as possible.

3.3 The competition programme needs to be modified to attract a wider range of competitors.

3.4 SSE needs to develop its own, more accurate key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure participation rates and satisfaction levels.

### **4. Significant omissions from the Funding Bid**

4.1 There is no mention of the part snowsport could play in improving the health of the nation. Cross Country skiing is particularly beneficial as it involves all the muscles of the body as well as the cardiovascular system. It also provides excellent opportunity for cross-training for elite competitors in other sports (e.g. canoeing). Competitive Cross Country Skiers are some of the fittest athletes in the World.

4.2 There is no mention of restructuring of the sport although, hopefully, this has not been forgotten even if the last attempt at it failed.

- It would simplify integration with HE and the Services
- It would help to create a UK-wide Facilities Strategy which would affect Snowsport GB (SSGB) as well
- It would help in formulating a more rational and less overcrowded competition calendar
- It would create a more accountable (help to avoid current financial problems) and democratic organisation
- It would be more attractive to potential sponsors of snowsports

### **5. Detailed comments**

Detailed comments paragraph-by-paragraph on the Funding Bid are shown in the Appendix

Detailed comments (paragraph by paragraph)

**Executive Summary**

P 3 Does 1 X 30 mean one half hour per week? It is not worth fitting boots and equipment for less than an hour.

What about:

- Ø An accreditation system for snowsport centres in England
- Ø Integration of Services Snowsport Clubs into Snowsport England

P 3 Integration of HE and the Services would be much easier to achieve in a unified structure rather than through the home nations individually.

**1. Introduction**

P 5 There is considerable scope for increased membership from existing participants as most individual members are performers or coaches and most participants are not members of clubs.

P 5 SSE is not well placed to deliver increased weekly participation in snowsports because of a shortage of adequate local facilities and still no strategy for improving the situation.

**2.1 Snowsports**

P 6 The various types of cross country competition should be listed as all Alpine types are listed. There is no mention of ski touring, which can be both Alpine and Nordic. Ski jumping, which is listed separately, is recognised as a Nordic discipline internationally. Telemark should also be mentioned here as it is recognised by some organisations (including SSE) as a part of Nordic and by others (including BASI) as a separate discipline in its own right.

**2.2 Snowsport England**

P 6 Should explain that 'SSE' is the trading name of the English Ski Council Ltd as 'ESC' is still a more familiar name than 'SSE' to many people and it needs to be clear that they are not two separate bodies.

P 6 The regional associations are currently being reviewed as some are much more successful than others. The regional associations are autonomous bodies created before the ESC which creates a structural weakness within SSE

**2.3 Facilities**

P 7 No mention of natural snow facilities in Northern England or of some seasonal out-door (not refrigerated) artificial snow centres, if they are still running. The Sport England web site currently lists 50 skiing facilities of which 5 are indoor artificial snow and 5 are outdoor natural snow, which suggests that there have been 2 more closures since the submission was made.

P 8 Roller skiing: Should say that roller skiing does require access to good quality tarmac without traffic; only a limited number of cycle tracks provide what is needed. This section should also point out various problems in relation to Nordic facilities in England. This requires coordination with British Cycling and Sustrans.

P 8 Nordic: The only dedicated Nordic facility in the UK is at Huntly, in the far north of Scotland. In spite of its remoteness, it is occasionally used by some English skiers for national level training and competition.

P 8 Biathlon: The only biathlon facilities are in Scotland at East Grange Biathlon Centre, Moray and at Glenmore Lodge, Aviemore, Scotland. They are occasionally used by some English skiers for training and competition. East Grange is used particularly by the Services and local schools.

P 8 Roller skiing: Unfortunately the roller ski circuit at Glenmore Lodge is badly designed and poorly maintained although it was built specifically for the British Biathlon Squad.

P 8 Nordic: The Nordic centre probably most widely used by English skiers is Kvitåvatn Fjellstoge in Norway. This was set up as a mountain hotel and ski training centre by a retired British serviceman. It is now managed for a Danish co-operative by a couple who were very much involved in the early stages of the development of SSE's Nordic coaching scheme and SSE runs annual coaching courses there. Because of the limited number of Nordic skiers at present, it is very unlikely that an exclusively dedicated Nordic centre in England would be economically viable. However, partnership arrangements should be possible and SSE needs to work more closely with British Cycling with a view to this being achieved.

P 8 *A well-argued strategy would show that the areas in greatest need for more and better facilities are Greater London and Merseyside, not East Midlands and Yorkshire.*

P 8 It is also important to note that a centre with 2 hours drive is not a 'local' facility and will not provide a facility for regular (at least one per week) training for the majority of people; most people will only be able to use indoor snow centres for an occasional day out. To most people, 'local' means within ½ hour travel time and accessible by public transport. Regular practice (at least once per week) is only practicable at reasonable cost if there is a local centre within ½ hour travel time. This view was confirmed by surveys I conducted a few years ago now. It is not sensible to spend more time in travelling to and from an activity than on the activity itself; most people only spend an hour on an artificial slope.

P 8 A facilities Strategy would be better formulated on a UK-wide basis rather than a Home Nation Governing Body (HNGB) basis, particularly as it is something SSGB should be involved with as well. However, this would bring in the extra complication of Scottish Ski Resorts.

Observation – There is a lack of facilities in some major areas of population, in particular Greater London and Merseyside.

Observation – most Regions have some counties with no facilities or very inadequate facilities.

Observation – Facilities are being closed or threatened at an alarming rate.

Observation – There is an opportunity for the provision of more *plastic and* indoor slopes in strategic locations.

Observation – Most Regions have some Counties/Unity Authorities with no adequate snowsport facilities.

## 2.4 Clubs

P 8 Add: "to clubs which exist mainly to organise holidays and social events". Some Clubs, particularly Nordic ones, were founded to promote ski touring (both Alpine and Nordic). With climate change in recent years, opportunity to tour in England (and even in Scotland) has become a rare event.

P 8 Would that all slopes were as long as 100m! Bebington Oval slope is 40m and I think is now the shortest slope still open (if you count temporary closure for 2 seasons as 'still open'). My records, which may be out of date, show 14 slopes as 100 metres or less.

P 9 The important distinction is not “bristles” but ‘voids’, which are required for poles (as presently designed) but are considered by some to be dangerous because of risk of catching thumbs. It is nothing to do with “kindness for beginners”. [There is one indoor ‘snow’ centre where the surface is very hard and is even more unkind to anyone who falls on it than bristles].

P 9 Some surfaces provide a rather poor simulation of the skiing characteristics of snow.

P 9 There are probably few clubs in East Midlands and Yorkshire because there are large areas of thin population.

Observation – some clubs have difficulty accessing sufficient slope time due to lack of adequate local facilities.

## 2.5 Competitive Structure

P 9 “Within this group” is ambiguous. It appears to refer to “The vast majority” but appendix j suggests that it refers to high-level racers; or does “competence” refer to other skills than skiing? What I think the intension was, might have been conveyed more clearly if the last sentence on this page had said: “See appendix j for an example of how the members of just one family can get involved in the sport in different ways and at different levels”.

P 10 The masters’ programme is well established in some countries and through FIS but not very well established yet in the UK. The Alpine Committee is focussed too much on youngsters aiming at National Squads and overlooks the fact that few of skiers start at an age which makes National Squad level a realistic target, no matter how talented they turn out to be.

P 10 The structure needs to be modified to encourage wider participation in competition without the commitment needed for National Squad membership. I did put proposals to the Alpine Race Committee on how this might be achieved but I received no feedback. Another project for recreational competition might be the re-vamping of the old FUNSTAR programme. (See also my comments on p 66). Some of the few skiers who have taken up racing later in life have won medals in FIS Masters Races, even though they are often competing against racers who were in National Squads in their youth.

P 10 A weak competition structure in some regions reduces the opportunity to compete at lower levels. Hopefully the current regional reviews will address this issue.

P 11 A pity numbers for Seniors and Masters are not recorded separately.

P 12 It is not clear what the diagram is meant to represent.

P 12 ***There appears to be a lack of awareness that the distribution of performers reflects the distribution of facilities and, probably to a lesser extent, the distribution of the population.***

P 13 Whilst there may be low participation levels in Nordic disciplines, it is a pity that attention is not drawn to the high levels achieved by some of these individuals with virtually no support from the governing body or sponsors. Most cross country and biathlon performers are in the Army and are not involved with Snowsport England. This is one of the reasons why integrating the Services into Snowsport England as a key improvement should have been included on p 4. It is also worthy of note that the majority of civilian Nordic performers are in the masters age categories.

## 2.6 Snowsport in Schools

P13-14 There appears to be a failure to realise that the low number of school club links is largely due to the fact that most clubs do not have sufficient access to good facilities. It is little surprising that it has been possible to set up excellent programmes in Norfolk because Norfolk Ski Club owns one of the best facilities in the country.

P13 Some Regions and Clubs run special races for local schools (up until the recent temporary closure of the Bebington Oval slope, Merseyside Ski Club ran races for Wirral schools even though the slope is only long enough for 5 gates).

## 2.7 Snowsport in Higher Education

P 14 This is also the situation within all the Services, including the Police and Fire Services.

P 14 It would be easier to integrate HE and the Services into a unified structure than into the HNGBs

P 14 It is unlikely that HE or the Services will be interested in being more involved with SSE unless a better package of benefits is on offer.

## 2.8 Coaching

P 14 The English Ski Council (ESC, later called Snowsport England) was not founded until 1979. The coaching scheme was started as part of the National Ski Federation of Great Britain (NSFGB) and was transferred to the ESC, with first registrations from January 1980. The NSFGB's Cross Country Instructors scheme was transferred to BASI and the SSE Nordic Coaching scheme was introduced from scratch at a later date.

P 14 It is a pity that the HNGB collaboration to form UK Snowsport could not have been extended to the whole sport in the abortive 'Modernisation' project.

P 15

Ø Nordic, including Telemarking

## 2.9 The Profile and Demographics of Snowsports

P 15 The vast difference in participation rates shown by the Active People Survey and the Crystal Ski Industry Report highlights the unsuitability of the Active People Survey questionnaire for snowsports.

P 15 Although it recognises that there is a massive potential for increasing participation in snowsports, this section fails to highlight the fact that the majority of current snowsport participants have no connection with the governing body. There perhaps needs to be a separate section to discuss individual snowsport participants. Whilst SSE introduced an individual membership a few years ago, it was never developed as an attractive package. ***SSE needs to learn from the BMC, which was in a similar situation, but, by developing its individual membership package, it nearly doubled its membership within 6 years.***

Observation – there is a massive potential for increasing the membership of Snowsport England from existing participants in the sport.

P16 I find it surprising that participation rates for women and girls and disabled are below average for most sports; my casual observation would have suggested the opposite.

P 16 Probably the main reason for low participation rates amongst black and minority ethnic groups is that they tend to be concentrated in urban areas where facilities are inadequate.

P 16 Most snowsport centres are not user-friendly towards skiers with disabilities, particularly in design of and access to tows. Paraplegics, using sit-skis, should experience the joy of being able to use a ski slope largely independently of helpers once they have gained some experience.

P17 The diagram is far from clear. On the vertical axis, what as a % of what? On the horizontal axis the ethnic groups do not appear to have any relation to the bars. What is the significance of the horizontal red line?

P 18 Are we talking about participation levels in relation to the population or in relation to membership of SSE? I find it hard to believe that Central London has the highest participation level when there are no facilities in Central London and only one in Greater London. It is not, therefore, consistent with the location of facilities.  
(See also comments on pp 61-62 and 68-71).

## **2.10 Communication**

P 18 Events take place on a combination of plastic, roller skis and artificial snow.

P 18 *Overcoming the prejudiced view that snowsports are not a serious sporting activity and promoting the concept of snowsports being an activity for life are perhaps the key to the development of snowsports in England.*

P 18 It is to be hoped that there will be an increase in and an improvement of plastic slope facilities as well as indoor snow facilities.

P 19 One of the problems SSE will have to overcome is that some clubs have become very insular in their outlook and may not have the will to deliver on the lines SSE is hoping for.

## **3. Summary of observations and delivery through interventions**

### **Intervention 1 Increasing Participation and Membership**

There is a lack of facilities particularly in Greater London and Merseyside

*There is a need for a strong facilities strategy to address this issue.*

There is a need for more clubs, particularly in areas of high population, and ones which will help to deliver through school links.

*There is a massive potential for increasing governing body membership from existing participants.*

There is opportunity for the provision of more *plastic and* indoor slopes in strategic locations.

### **Intervention 2 Clubs and Coaching**

Several slopes are under threat often because of poor design (or they have not developed with the sport), poor condition or poor management.

Some clubs have difficulty accessing sufficient slope time due to lack of adequate local facilities.

*There is a need to integrate all the Services clubs, including the Police and Fire Services into the SSE structure.*

### **Intervention 3 Performance Pathway and Talent Identification**

*Snowsport England needs to develop and deliver a strong communication strategy to raise awareness of snowsports.*

There is no accreditation system for snowsport centres in the UK.

### **Intervention 4 Children and Young People**

*School club programmes are limited by a lack of adequate local facilities in many areas.*

#### 4. Interventions

P 22 Does 1 X 30 mean half an hour per week all year round? Or is it a seasonal average? If it is, then best say so. If not, then it is impracticable; it is not worth the time spent fitting boots and equipment for less than an hour.

P 22 Best give figures to nearest 100 in this sort of context.

P 23 ***Work to develop new and improved facilities – 20 years overdue!*** This will require a well-worked out strategy document, not just technical advice to would-be developers.

P 23

- Further analysis on demand for the sport, and the identification of priority locations for new *plastic and* indoor facilities.

P 23 What is a S106 legal agreement?

P 23 What is meant by “Project based guidance”?

P 23 Snowcamp and other attempts to increase participants from inner city areas and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities will be severely limited by lack of local facilities, particularly London and Merseyside.

P 23 ***A membership benefits package to include individual members.*** This is also crucial and should have been developed and put in place, as recommended by most of the working party, at the time the individual membership was introduced. Individual membership should not be seen as just closer involvement of license holders. A broader membership structure was recommended by the Membership and Voting Working Group (arising from a paper from me) during the Modernisation debate but unfortunately these recommendations were incorrectly minuted. This structure could still be adopted by SSE.

P 24 Round figures to nearest 100 in this sort of context.

P 24 The Active People survey seems to come up with a very low participation rate for snowsports compared with other surveys. This is probably due to the wording of the questions being unsuitable for our sport, being largely restricted to a holiday activity for many people. SSE should use other indicators of participation rate as well.

P 25 Do not be too optimistic about planning applications resulting in a facility being built! I must have supported at least a dozen indoor snow and more artificial slope schemes in the NW Region over the years and only Chill Factor has come to fruition (many years after its initial conception). Some of these projects were promoted by high-profile press releases implying opening within a couple of years. It is not unknown for a developer to go bust or get taken over by a company with other ideas, even after a project has been started.

P 25 There is nothing SSE can do to “ensure that new facilities are built in the right locations” but if it has a good ‘Strategy’, supported by well researched statistics, developers will ignore it at their peril.

P 25 SSE needs to get away from the concept that all facilities these days have to be built and operated by commercial leisure companies. Whilst it is unlikely that a members’ club or the governing body would ever be able to raise sufficient funds to build a centre satisfying the aspirations of today’s snowsport enthusiasts, a trust set up as a partnership arrangement, including representatives of the snowsport community, is a realistic objective. However, I am told that Snowsport Wales owns and runs a profitable slope. I was pointed in the direction of partnerships by the Sports Council NW, following a seminar on such sports projects, but it was not possible to pursue the idea in the Region without the backing of a governing body strategy.

P 25 Whilst the pilot project in Norfolk was very successful, unfortunately, it is unlikely to be achievable elsewhere. Norfolk Ski Club owns and operates one of the best snowsport centres in the country and is therefore in a strong position to work along with its enlightened County Sports

Partnership. The nearest equivalent is probably Pendle. However, I have got nowhere in my region in trying to interest County Sports Partnerships in snowsports.

P 28 No funding appears to have been allocated to producing a facilities strategy.

#### **4.2 Intervention 2 – Clubs & Coaching**

P 30 SSE needs to be aware of the growing insularity of some clubs which may prevent the implementation of the interventions required. This must also be a factor in the decline of some regional associations. It also has to be cognisant of the ever increasing difficulty of recruiting within voluntary organisers. All too often these days, beginners and early intermediates just use clubs as cheap ski schools and do not keep up membership, let alone get involved in their running. Once they have got what they want, they are never seen again.

P 30 Xscape and Snoasis are (or will be) commercial ski centres, not members clubs.

P 30 The appointment of Development Officers is a major and long over-due development for SSE. However, they are likely to find that in many areas what they can do will be restricted by the lack of local facilities.

P 32 It was disappointing to learn that the SSE Coaching Scheme was not already aligned with SCUUK. At one time, the ESC Coaching Scheme was the envy of other sports.

P 33 Sadly the targets for Snowmark clubs look unrealistic to me.

P 33-34 I take it that these figures refer to license holders (start licenses and coaching licenses) rather than individual subscribers.

P 35 Superfluous “their” 6 lines from the bottom.

P 35 The accreditation of snowsport centres in England would ensure safety for all snowsport participants, a more enjoyable experience and better value for money at snow centres in England. It could make a significant contribution to satisfaction levels.

P 37 Many Clubs see SSE as only necessary to obtain insurance cover. Such clubs have no interest in the Regional Association. Larger clubs often look at the total sum they contribute rather than the contribution each participant is asked to make towards the running and development of the sport through their Club subscription. The contribution of each individual member through their club is little more than the price of a pint.

#### **4.3. Intervention 3 – Performance Pathways and Talent Identification**

P 38 Whilst the aim is to develop pathways across all snowsport disciplines, there is no mention of Nordic.

#### **4.4 Intervention 4 – Children and young people**

P 43 Xscape and Chill Factor are commercial centres not members’ clubs.

### **Appendices**

#### **a. Snowsport England Forward Plan 2007-2010**

P 48-55 I think I commented on this at the time it came out. It needs to be reviewed annually to check that it is running to target.

## **b. Crystal Ski Industry Survey 07/08**

P 56-58      Whilst these surveys have shown a steady and encouraging growth in recent years, the 08/09 survey shows a significant decline.

## **c. Maps**

### **I. Facilities in England**

P 59      This contains significant errors. What is its source of these maps?

Chill Factor is shown just north of Lancaster and nowhere near Manchester.  
Three northern natural snow facilities are shown as plastic facilities.

The circles with dots in are not shown in the key. Are they just towns or are they projected or closed centres?

### **II Snowsport England affiliated clubs**

P 60      This is not a very useful map. Clubs do not necessarily operate in one place and it is slopes not clubs which can be described as indoor or outdoor.

### **III Location of performers and their disciplines**

P 61      I have been trying for some time to find software to draw up maps of this kind. Unfortunately the scale of this map is too small to provide useful information. There must be many more registered performers than shown. Have they been grouped in some way? If drawn at a larger scale so that most performers can be shown separately, I think it would show the very significant result that performers (and probably coaches) tend to be concentrated close to good facilities rather than in large areas of population. This would indicate that athletes develop where there are good facilities close to home. Thus the existence of the facility tends to create the demand and it would be a mistake to assume that low demand at present indicates that a facility is not needed. I would like to know how this map was produced so that I can do some further research on this.

### **IV Participation rates**

P 62      Number of what sort of person as a % of what?

It is not particularly helpful to show participation by counties. Participation by local authority areas would be much more useful but would require a big table rather than a map.

P 62      The high participation rate in London is very surprising considering the lack of facilities. How has the data been collected? Does it by chance represent the membership of the Ski Club of Great Britain?

## **f. Calendar of national competitions**

P 66      I have commented before to the Alpine Committee on the inappropriateness of linking Club National events with Grand Prix events. They used to be and should continue to be aimed at competitors with different levels of experience. It is ridiculous that the prize winners in Club

National Races are these days often the same people as win prizes in the Grand Prix event. This is disheartening for those just coming into racing. If there is a demand for two-day events from Grand Prix racers (I can understand this because of the travel distances involved) then that is what they should be given (may be second day head-to-head or GS) not opportunity to take over CN races intended to encourage participation.

P 66 The Calendar is in general over-full and requires some rationalisation. This will involve negotiation with other snowsport HNGBs and SSGB. This is another area where a unified structure would help, particularly for junior Alpine events which need to take place during school holidays.

P 67 The Scottish Masters Ski Championships is not a seeded race – far from it.

### **g. Snowcamp plan**

P 68-71 This sounds an excellent scheme at first glance but, is it sustainable? There is not much point in introducing disadvantaged people to a sport if they are unlikely to be able to continue to participate without continuous subsidy. It will only result in frustration. I note that a substantial part of the budget is travel costs. This underlines the need for more local facilities in London. By local, I mean within half an hour's travel time and accessible by public transport.

### **h. Graphs to show targeted increase in Snowsports**

P 72 I doubt the increase in participation in clubs is realistic. There is a general reduction in interest in clubs of all kinds and difficulty in finding volunteers to run them. For snowports, there is the added problem of shortage of adequate local facilities.

### **i. Graphs to show targeted increase in 5-18 participation and school links**

P 73 I doubt that these targets are realistic for the same reason as above.

09/07/09