Five Year Club Development Strategy:

18-22
To be the best that we can be...
By making brilliant things happen on and off the pitch and creating an exciting match day experience, we will bring passionate people together and strengthen our club and our fan base.
Our vision is to see Crusaders participating successfully in the NIFL (Irish League) Premier division by expanding our footballing reputation in cross-national competition. The future we envisage is of an inclusive, successful and commercially sustainable ‘no-dividends’ football club, owned and run by fans, operating at Seaview and elsewhere as a centre of football excellence, used and frequented by all sections of our community.

We seek to operate as an integral part of the community, helping meet societal needs in terms of social inclusion, health and well-being and education. We will have close links with other community and sporting organisations, with the profile and brand image of the club benefitting our locality and catchment areas as well as Crusaders.

Our strategic objectives, therefore, are:

a) **Promoting sustainability:** to build a sustainable, income generating club, run as a business, improving football-related and non-football commercial income to sustain our sporting core success;

b) **Promoting excellence:** to build a competitive senior team moving from “semi-pro” status to “three-quarter-pro” capable of competing regularly for domestic trophies, European qualification and – in time – capable of challenging to reach European group-stage football. In support, the club will develop and improve its Football Development Centre, focused on quality, to ensure that the Crusaders FC senior teams benefit from a regular and high quality supply of young players ready and capable of playing at senior level and beyond;

c) **Promoting Football for All:** to promote opportunities to all young people to progress to the level appropriate to their ability and choice; to promote ‘grassroots’ football within all communities and under-represented groups to grow the Crusaders ‘family’;

d) **Social Inclusion:** to cement the place of Crusaders FC as a ‘networked’ club at the heart of community, as a focal point to the local area, its people and families.
To realise these objectives this Strategy sets out five priority areas of focus which include strategic actions and performance measures for each that will help us achieve our ambitious objectives.
Like most Irish League clubs, Crusaders FC has generally planned and managed on a season by season basis. Current practice is to set targets annually within the Club Development Plan as well as within the domestic and UEFA licensing process. Looking forward (and because of the level at which the club has been operating – on and off the field - in more recent years) it is now necessary to develop a more formal, longer-term vision. We will have five broad areas of focus:

- Sports Excellence & Developing talent
- Growing the fan base
- Enhancing the facilities
- Improving the backroom
- Financial sustainability

This Strategic Plan articulates the type of ambition which has guided the management of the club for some time. After broad consultation within the club and with external stakeholders this five-year plan sets down for the first time the overall ambition or vision that we all hold for Crusaders FC. It sets out, in a structured way and through specific objectives, how we intend to achieve these ambitions. We have set ourselves targets, and performance indicators with deadlines so that we can assess our progress over the five-year timeframe of the plan. The club would like to thank all those who participated in the consultation process.

Stephen Bell
Chairperson
Sports Excellence & Developing talent

**This means:**

- Achieving consistent success in domestic competition, with regular qualification for European competition;
- Supporting a change in seasonality in the football calendar to support competitive success in Europe;
- Improve standards by supporting the reinstitution of a meaningful all-Ireland competition, and/or meaningful inter-league competition;
- Creating a talent platform for the first team through a “one-club” playing philosophy with researched sports-science inputs at all levels;
- Developing the U20 reserve team as an attractive part of the player pathway;
- Growing and improving the Football Development Centre;
• Investing in our women’s’ game and maintaining opportunities and pathways for all age levels (e.g., skills schools, mini soccer, summer ‘camp’ schemes).

**We will do this by:**

• ‘Going Pro’ through a plan for a ‘3/4 pro’ set-up, with modern sports-science inputs;

• Creating a clear player development pathway, and alignment with the IFA’s Youth Football Strategy 2015-25¹ and a quality football and sports science apprenticeship scheme;

• Excellence in player development married to care for the ‘whole player’, including physical and mental well-being and educational and employment opportunities;

• Considering player scholarships/foreign club exchanges and player loans as part of the pathway;

• Exploring opportunities to broaden Crusaders’ football reach including social football, creating teams for those with disabilities, Futsal and other means. Consideration of natural, unforced movement towards a continental style Multi-Sports club with other sports (boxing, running, basketball etc) operating in Red and Black under a Crusaders banner.

**We will check progress by:**

• Results;

• Analysis, sports science testing;

• Manager-led annual reviews.

**Targets: to be measured by:**

• Regular domestic trophy success;

• Regular UEFA qualification;

• FDC receiving benchmarked quality award standard;

• By 2022, 3 first team players will have come from the Crusaders FDC;

• Transfer fees, and the number of players transferred to the professional game outside of Northern Ireland.

**Key considerations**

• Coaching standards;

• Improving the professional environment and support-system.

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¹. See at https://www.irishfa.com/media/4282/ifa-youth-strategy-low-resolution.pdf
Growing the fan base

This means:
• Enhancing the brand and profile of the club (better marketing);
• Having an exciting match day experience;
• Strengthening our position in the local community and maintaining our ‘all-communities’ focus.

We will do this by:
• Creating a welcoming, family friendly environment - develop a Welcome, Accessible, Good-quality & Safe (WAGS) strategy to ensure access for all;
• Planning ahead – renewing the club marketing plan, and community relations audit to develop an overall club promotion plan, including a club-wide ‘intra’-communications strategy;
• Recruiting a senior post for club promotion and marketing – responsible for research-based fan engagement initiatives and growing the club generally;
• Engaging with fans (home, away, neutral, regular, potential and ‘armchair’ fans) – improving our website, social media contact and CRM communications; building on the good work with players and management interviews, promotions and match day entertainment;
• Appointing a lead for the ‘Crues in the Community’ brand to develop social programmes and engage in a structured way with schools and youth organisations throughout our catchment areas;
• Use of education and employability through the McDonald Centre as a key driver of Crusaders work in the community and in growing the base;
• Demonstrate community leadership by making ‘common-cause’ with other North Belfast clubs, notably Cliftonville FC and intermediate clubs to make ‘real’ our commitment to being an open, welcoming club in Northern Ireland’s most communally segregated area;
Learn from others: clubs like Everton, Falkirk, Brentford, AFC Wimbledon and FC United of Manchester, all clubs who have successfully, in different ways, developed strong, purposeful, fan and community programmes to great effect;

Building our stakeholder links – notably seeking better relations with Belfast and Antrim & Newtownabbey Councils, the IFA, NIFL, local community organisations and businesses;

Celebrating (not hiding) the club’s wider community engagement efforts.

**We will check progress by:**

- Periodically reviewing the demographics of our support and targeting opportunities for growth / increasing membership;
- Reporting match day attendances and annual averages;
- Monitoring hits on the website, social media reach and brand awareness.

**Target:** By 2022 Crusaders will have over 600 season ticket holding members and an average competitive match-day attendance of 2,000.

**Key considerations**

- By developing a top-class small stadium, and making it easy to get to games;
- By running attractive and entertaining match events at affordability prices for families and those with lower incomes;
- Promoting the club and the Crusaders brand, developing the clubs’ community reach, and celebrating success;
- Learning from other sports, working with other clubs to promote the Irish League - converting potential and ‘armchair’ fans.
Enhancing the facilities

This means:
- Building a 4,500 seater stadium developed to UEFA Category 3 standards – with a new St Vincent Street stand, incorporating club-house, gym, medical, sports-science and corporate facilities, with a club museum and modern food and beverage outlets;
- Developing a feature Shore Road stadium entrance building;
- Creating quality training facilities at Threemilewater, Newtownabbey;
- Establishing the McDonald Education Centre;
- Providing a parking scheme on the St Vincent Street - Skegoneil Street strip-site.

We will do this by:
- Raising funds;
- Planning to best-practice standards with a stadium and facilities reference (consultation) group;
- Developing a Welcome, Accessible, Good quality & Safe (WAGS) strategy;
- Developing a social and environmental improvement plan for facilities.

We will check progress by:
- Securing our UEFA licence each year;
- Reporting plans and progress for infrastructure improvements and target dates for completion, to our members, fans and stakeholders.

Target: By 2022 Seaview will be fully developed as a Category 3 stadium and the club will have quality training facilities.

Key considerations:
- Developing a funding strategy;
- Building in rental & commercial streams;
- Planning for whole-life (running cost) of facilities.
Improving the backroom

This means:
• Restructuring to achieve a single integrated governance, administrative and records system – working to end the ‘silo’ mentality and create a quality, seamless ‘backroom’ for the club;
• Employing a central administrative core, supported by trained volunteers;
• Developing as a technology-enabled organisation, maximising the potential and ‘intelligence’ of Customer Relationship Management tools, and modern Human Resources practice;
• Consciously investing in our staff, volunteers and systems;
• Adherence to regulatory compliance – such as IFA/UEFA licencing, bar licencing, insurance, food standards, legal, health, safety and child welfare requirements.

We will do this by:
• Appointing a general manager/ chief operating officer – to line manage all non-football staff;
• Creating a unitary administrative system - a common way of doing things;
• Developing a quality benchmarked volunteering system to encourage new volunteers to lessen the burden on the existing backroom;
• Developing a ‘specialist talent pool’ of skilled people prepared to assist the club in a variety of disciplines;
• Creating an ethos of ‘customer relationship management’ throughout the club;
• Adopting ‘good practice’ management structures and a code of conduct for staff, volunteers, players and fans;
• Updating our records systems and developing continuity plans.

We will check progress by:
• Reporting on ‘Backroom’ targets within the Annual Report;
• Reporting on staffing and volunteer needs and gaps, improving contingency for adequate cover and support;
• Setting target dates for completing training and refreshing technology/systems;
• Benchmark the club with other football clubs (for eg, Dundalk FC) and against other sports (eg Belfast Giants) – to develop learning and good practice locally and internationally.

**Target:** By 2021, Crusaders FC will have a benchmarked organisational award, grown its volunteering base and all staff will have been trained in a new, restructured way of operating with better record keeping, making greater use of information technology and data analysis.

**Key considerations**
• Establish clear staff leadership, and clear, easily understood, club structures;
• Establish clear, easily understood administrative and personnel systems;
• Encourage club values of loyalty, respect, passion, innovation, excellence and trust.
Sustainability

This means:

- Improving the finances of the club by increasing revenue streams and being less reliant on football generated or European competition money;
- Planning for a balanced budget, and manageable cash-flows; notably, there should be realistic planned budget allocations for facets of important club development other than the core professional player/staff budget;
- Aspiring to an adequate revenue reserve based on best-practice revenue accounting standards (or up to three months’ standard running-costs expenditure);
- Maintaining good financial governance & regulations.

We will do this by:

- Having clear and well documented record keeping and robust accounts;
- Continue to develop commercial and sponsorship opportunities;
- Set up a ‘Business Network’ of sponsors and partners;
- Set up a ‘Key Benefactors’ group;
- Continue to support fans’ initiatives (200 club, 50/50’s and other fund raising ideas);
- Enhancing the merchandise offer;
- Increasing the use of the stadium and facilities (rental and hires).

We will check progress by:

- Reporting quarterly on the financial health of the club’;
- Annual Accounts to all members;
- Developing, over time, an internal audit function;
- Conducting regular cost-efficiency reviews.

Target: By 2022 the club will have a reserve of £0.25m and be 20% more efficient.

Key considerations

- Planned budgets;
- Cash-flow manageability;
- Communicate results (Impact reporting).
How will we do it?
By 5 years of development with target dates for achieving improvements

2018
- Restructured Club
- Gen. Manager Appointed
- McDonald Centre open
- Move to 3-Q-Pro
- Apprenticeship starts
- New Club shop open

2019
- CRM system informing planning; 12 vols trained
- Phase 1 T-M-W training complex
- Crusaders museum open
- Business network set-up
- Benefactor Group set-up
- HR systems up to date
Crusaders Football Club - Five Year Strategy

2020

- Seaview-Railway carpark completed
- Specialist talent pool of volunteers active
- Unitary Admin & Records system complete
- Vibrant web, social media offer
- 10,000 CRM contacts

2021

- Work starts on South Stand (St Vincent St)
- Player development reviewed & home grown talent in 1st team assessed
- Full range of footballing teams, FDC, Women, Futsal, Disabilities
- Crusaders Multi-sport club emerging
- Social impact study of Crues in Community

2022

- A larger fan base, highest average match day gates and income
- St Vincent Stand complete
- Threemilewater complete
- £0.25m reserve, cash-flow manageability achieved
- Achieved benchmarked club administration award

No.1 NI football club on and off field?