

LARNE FC NI (Charity)

Trustees' Annual Report for Year 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Our Vision

1.1.1 Is to create a community-facing organisation that promotes sport, education, health, and wellbeing, by prioritising people, place and planning.

1.2 Our Mission

1.2.1 To promote community participation in healthy recreation, as well as social development of players and their families, by providing facilities for the playing of Association Football for the residents of Larne and its environs. As a community-focused charity, local people are at the heart of all we do, and we ensure flexibility to respond to local needs as they present.

1.2.2 Provide, and assist in providing, facilities for sport, recreation and other leisure-time occupation of such persons who have need for such facilities, by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, poverty, or social and economic circumstances, or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare.

1.2.3 The Charity will be a vehicle for development, regeneration and support within our community, and will encourage everyone to improve their health and wellbeing through the provision of first-class sporting, educational and recreational facilities, grants and charitable resources.

1.2.4 Advance the education of children and young people through such means as the Trustees think fit, and in accordance with the law.

2.0 What We Do (Our Purpose)

2.1 Our purpose is to promote participation in sport, education and wellbeing programmes, whilst encouraging good community relations through the provision of quality facilities and grants.

2.2 The Charity has guardianship of the properties located at Inver Park Stadium (see 4.4 below) and the Larne Academy of Sport (see 4.3 below), both in the town of Larne.

2.3 It also oversees the **Brighter Futures Fund**, a small grant awarding element of the Charity (see 4.2 Below).

3.0 Who We Target (Our Beneficiaries)

3.1 The Charity targets groups and individuals in our local community from all age groups, regardless of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, marital status, dependents and sexual orientation.

3.2 The local community benefits from the provision of our facilities.

- 3.3 Grass-roots sporting organisations and other community-anchored groups and individuals benefit from our small grants fund, Brighter Futures.
- 3.4 In targeting the above, our Charity will always seek to prioritise those in greatest need, be that through disadvantage or social deprivation.

4.0 Our Activities

4.1 Property Portfolio

4.1.1 The major function of the Charity is to be responsible for ensuring the properties of the Charity are utilised for the purposes laid down and that Inver Park Stadium and the Larne Academy of Sport are maintained to an acceptable standard and enhanced where and when possible.

4.2 Brighter Futures

4.2.1 A further function of the Charity is to deliver the **Brighter Futures Fund** grants awards scheme.

4.2.2 Brighter Futures is targeted at individuals and groups within, primarily, the Larne bounds of Mid and East Antrim Council, and offers grant-aid for worthwhile projects.

4.2.3 Applications for support are sought under the 4 categories of Sport and Recreation, Business Enterprise, Education and Training, and Community Needs. The programme is a rolling one, receiving applications throughout the year, with a straightforward online application process and the possibility of a face-to-face interview, if required by Trustees. Trustees use a criteria-based project assessment process to judge the merits of applications received.

4.2.4 The Charity accepts monetary and other donations from local and other donors, including businesses and individuals, and disburses the awards to projects that are successful in the application process; and in the year this report covers, almost £16,000 was distributed.

4.2.5 Examples of organisational projects awarded funding in 2022-23 are computers for primary schools, Larne Town regeneration project, funding a friendship group and supporting a hurling competition; many individuals were also funded, including young, local internationals competing in sports such as hockey, football and boxing; young entrepreneurial startups were also supported. Thirty-three grants were awarded.

4.3 Larne Academy of Sport (formerly The Cliff)

4.3.1 In 2022 the Charity acquired a lease for 25 years, via a Deed of Transfer of Charitable Undertaking, from M&EA Council for a Larne sports and leisure facility known at that time as **'The Cliff'** and located in the Seacourt area of the town.

4.3.2 The facility had been opened in 2009, thanks to a £2.4m joint grant by Sport NI and M&EA Council. The funding was awarded to the Trustees of The Cliff Association, also a registered charity, that then enhanced the capital assets of the charity by way of an extension of the former, old community centre. Included at the time was a 3G pitch. Unfortunately, due to a High Court dispute between The Cliff Association and M&EA

Council, the facility had been largely unused for a significant number of years.

4.3.3 The Seacourt area is in the top 23% for educational attainment, skills and training deprivation, with 48% of residents having no or Level 1 only qualifications (**NISRA**). Child poverty in the area stands at 27% versus the national average of 19%.

4.3.4 When surveyed 92% of respondents in the area supported the refurbishment and reopening of The Cliff. The need for an indoor hall (60%), training/education facilities (46%) and a gym/fitness suite (47%) were among the responses given in the survey conducted.

4.3.5 It is fairly certain that, had it not been for the intervention of Larne FC NI, the facility at The Cliff would have fallen into further disrepair and possibly closed completely.

4.3.6 As part of the resolution of the dispute mentioned in 4.3.2 above, the Charity received stewardship of a damages payment, following a High Court ruling, of £200,000 from M&EA Council, and further funding from the owner of Larne Community Football Ltd, to lay a 3G playing surface and embark on a total refurbishment of the facility.

4.3.7 After a substantial upgrading of the facilities it reopened officially on 4th November 2022 as the Larne Academy of Sport. The refurbishment included the laying of a new 3G floodlit, outdoor playing surface, new gymnasium and an IT suite, together with a refurbished large sports hall, changing rooms and office space. This facility complements the Inver Park Stadium, also under the auspices of the Charity, providing two first-class community sports complexes for the town of Larne and beyond.

4.3.8 The Academy is now (March 2023) a hive of activity with its various facilities in use daily, totalling an average of 170 usage hours per month (and growing) as of March 2023.

4.4 Inver Park Stadium

4.4.1 The Stadium has undergone massive rebuilding, new building and refurbishment since 2017, with a new full-size 4G all-weather pitch laid and two completely new spectator stands built.

4.4.2 Other improvements include new home and away changing facilities, refreshment areas and toilet facilities.

4.4.3 Users include Larne Community Football Ltd, Larne Youth teams (all age groups), Larne FC Academy teams and Larne Women's Football Teams.

4.4.4 In the period of this report, over 20 separate third-party community and grass-roots organisations had access to our facilities at the Stadium.

5.0 Five-Year Strategy

5.1 The 5-year strategy for 2018-22, *'Aspire to Inspire'*, was jointly developed by Larne Community Football Ltd and the Charity. The strategy laid out objectives to be achieved over that period, and 90% were achieved.

5.2 The 2023-28 strategy is entitled *'For The Town'* and outlines the objectives for the two organisations during those years.

5.3 A subset of the two strategies was launched in September 2022 with the publication of the results of a commissioned survey. Titled '*A Vision for The Cliff and Surrounding Areas – For The Town*', the document outlined assessed community needs arising from the survey and various options for addressing those needs.

5.4 Focused primarily on the large Seacourt Estate in Larne, where the newly acquired Larne Academy of Sport was located (see 4.3 above), it sought to examine future positive, possible impacts for the Seacourt area (whereas '*For The Town*' covered the entire Larne area).

5.5 Key objectives set, in brief, were –

5.5.1 Outline potential future developments in the area.

5.5.2 Identify investment opportunities to realise these developments.

5.5.3 Investigate the key factors impacting on quality of life, including health and wellbeing, educational achievement and community relations.

5.5.4 Explore possible links with other community and sporting organisations.

5.5.5 Consult with key stakeholders including NIHE and M&EA Council.

5.5.6 Develop options for further development in the area assessed against community needs, potential social impact and deliverability.

The outworking of this strategy has dovetailed into the overarching '*For The Town*' 2023-28 strategy and is currently still being delivered.

6.0 Public Benefit

6.1 The benefit flowing from the use of Charity facilities and its Brighter Futures Awards scheme encompasses support for a range of sporting and leisure activities, provision of educational facilities, community activities support, and assistance for business startups and enterprise projects.

6.2 Examples of such benefit (not exhaustive) include training and match-play facilitation for soccer, gaelic games, hockey and cricket; provision of a computer suite for young Academy scholars and adult learners; grants to community support groups for drop-in provision, community festivals and networking; funding for town regeneration projects such as wall murals; and support for business startups including health therapies and beauty qualifications.

6.3 The benefits engendered are public, as opportunities for many sections of the community are provided, such as young people, adults, disadvantaged groups and the elderly.

6.4 Examples of grassroots, charity and community use of facilities, and receipt of Brighter Futures grant-aid, during 2022-23 include:

6.4.1 Larne Ladies Hockey Club.

6.4.2 Larne Primary Schools Soccer Tournament.

6.4.3 Larne Community Football Under 18 and Under 20 teams.

6.4.4 Larne FC Women's teams.

6.4.5 Community Twilight Soccer Programme.

6.4.6 Northern Ireland Supercup – international tournament.

6.4.7 Factory Community Forum.

6.4.8 Extern – support for homeless and those dealing with mental health issues.

6.4.9 Larne Golden Gloves – boxing club.

6.4.10 Equality Period – providing feminine hygiene advice and products to disadvantaged families.

6.4.11 Harbour Bears Nursery – childcare resources.

6.4.12 Local rowing clubs.

A full listing of service users and grantees is available on request. Many awards were to individuals who are not named here for data protection purposes.

6.5 Future possible developments being considered by Larne FC NI and Larne Community Football Ltd include instigation or expansion of facilities for other sports and recreational activities not currently well catered for. Examples include track facilities for BMX, Pump, Cross-Country and Mountain Biking; additional hard-standing, all-weather hockey pitch (only one is usable at this time in the Larne area); possibility of a 3G sports pitch covered by a 'dome' to ensure all-weather usage.

7.0 Risk Management and Mitigation

7.1 Trustees assess risks in each area of operation (see 2.0 above).

7.2 In the Charity's role as the guardian of properties, it ensures health and safety obligations are impressed upon and are being followed by all users, and safety signage is complete and up-to-date.

7.3 As the deliverer of the Brighter Futures Awards programme, trustees ensure only they can approve applications and can thus mitigate any possibility of granting organisations or individuals anything that might lead to possible injury to person or damage to facilities.

7.4 A risk register and risk assessment procedure are being developed.

7.5 Trustees have agreed to carry out a full review of the Charity's policies and procedures during reporting period 2023-2024.

8.0 Private Benefit

8.1 To ensure viability of the property portfolio of the Charity, Larne Community Football Ltd and the Larne FC Academy BTEC Programme are majority users of the Inver Park Stadium and the Larne Academy of Sport, during daylight hours. Usage during these hours of 0900-1600, for users other than the LCF Ltd football team and the Academy, can be accommodated but is very minimal.

8.2 The Trustees set aside a minimum 25% of available weekly time slots during the opening hours of 0900-2100 for community users other than LCF Ltd and the Academy. Presently (March 2023), this is proving adequate to fulfil the demands of community use; but trustees will continually review the percentage allocation to ensure equity.

9.0 Regard for the Charity Commission's Guidance

9.1 The Trustees confirm that, in this report and in the Charity's daily operations, they have taken into consideration, and have cognisance of, the guidance and advice of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Signed and Dated:

Trustee: 

Date: 23 / 01 / 2024