



**FOUNDATION  
OF LIGHT**

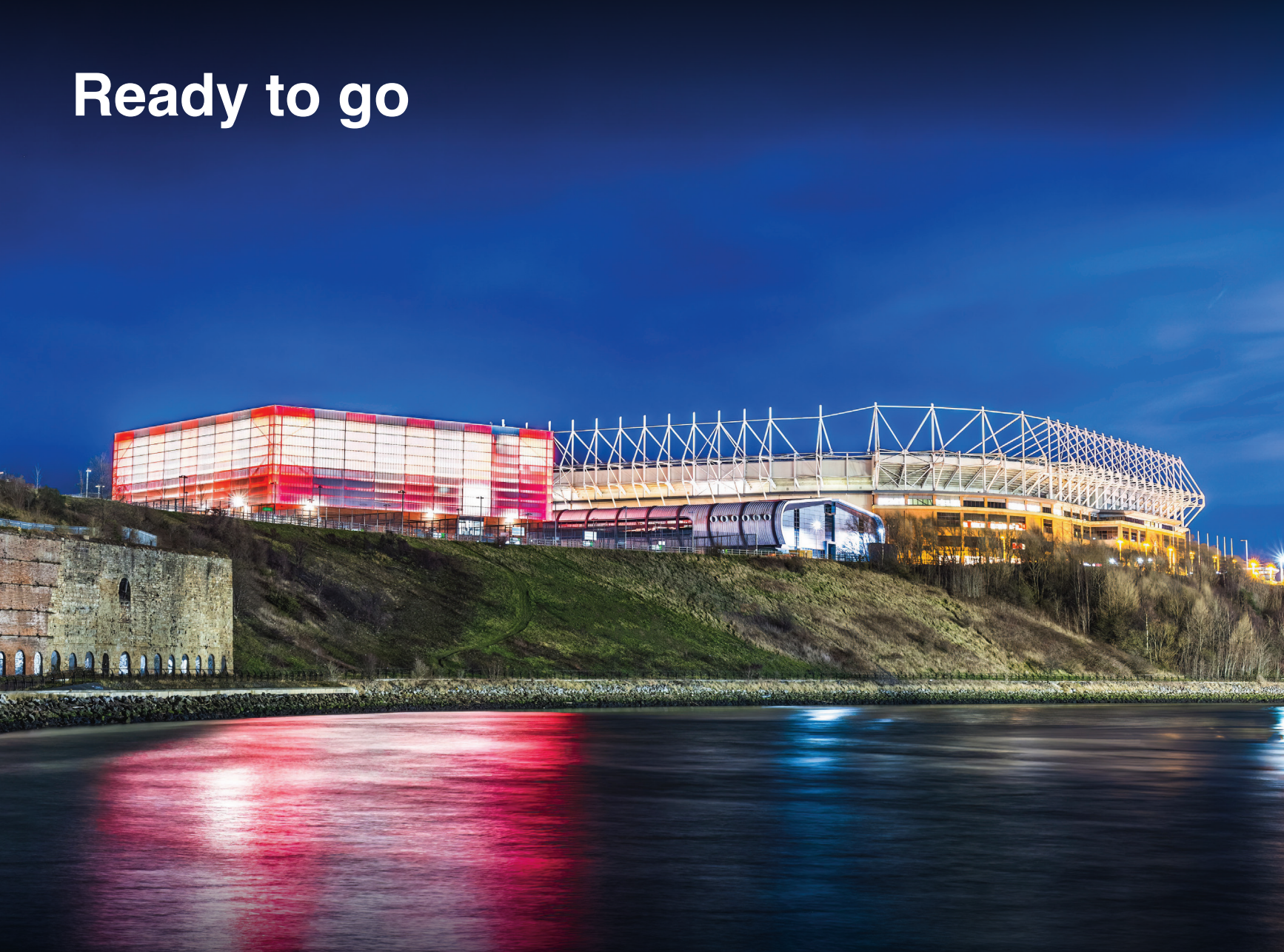
THE WORLD AT YOUR FEET

# Brighter tomorrow

Strategic Aims 2025-2030



# Ready to go



## Our region is changing and it's changing for the better



This is a pivotal moment for the North East, our club and our people. The potential here is unlimited. It's our role to help unlock aspirations in our communities. To help people realise, 'the world is at your feet'.

Exciting investments in creative industries, built environment and industrial innovation are heading here. This momentum brings transformative new sectors, real opportunities, and lasting growth.

Yet there is still a lot of work to do. Poverty is widespread and there are still too many people who are not in education, employment, or training, currently unable or uninspired to reach their full potential.

The world we live in is rapidly changing, but people are still suffering from loneliness, a lack of connection with the new opportunities, and deteriorating physical and mental health.





The UK and our communities are at a crossroads, sometimes fuelled by heightened tensions, rising cost of living and a volatile political landscape.

This social context further demonstrates why professional football and sports clubs, and their foundations have a crucial role in building communities and creating better opportunities for those who need them most.

With over 40 years of experience working with some of the seldom heard, isolated communities, our impact is reflected in the lives we make better, with the Foundation delivering almost two million meaningful contact hours over the past five years alone.

Still, we are needed more than ever. Our people are looking for a hand up, not a handout. Now is the time to take control of our destiny, together.

## A premier partnership





# How we are best placed to do it

The Club is the heart beat of the community, and the community is the soul of the club. They cannot exist without one another.

From the streets and across the stands, this synergy is the glue that binds us, inspires hope, and empowers people to be bold, creative and industrious. We provide experiences that are truly memorable and life changing.

Clubs and their foundations can be integral in re-shaping communities; working together and inviting key strategic players into the fold to support growth and prosperity while allowing us to realise aspirations and ambitions.

There is a team on the pitch that gives the fans a chance to celebrate and wear our hearts on our sleeves together. Away from the pitch, the Club, the Foundation, supporters' groups and other partners form a powerful team that allows the community to be proud, connected and happy. When we work together, we are at our best.

The Foundation of Light has a proven and trusted track record of making a difference in the community. In the last 20 plus years, we have invested over £50 million in local communities and worked with over half a million people - giving them bigger and better opportunities that lead to better lives.

The history and identity that defines us, the love of where we come from, and the Club we support makes our partnership a force to be reckoned with.

# Powered by people, driven by purpose



# About us

Our team brings a wealth of diverse skills, backgrounds, and lived experiences that reflect the communities we serve. The ability to build trusted, meaningful relationships with young people, vulnerable adults and families is at the heart of our approach.

The foundation works with partners and beneficiaries, taking a lead role or co-producing projects to benefit our communities and tackle some of society's biggest challenges.

Our vision and mission are underpinned by the unique power of SAFC's brand, our trusted reputation, and the 'Sunderland way'.

The areas we serve experience high levels of poverty and deprivation, considerable economic inactivity, poor physical and mental health, and dramatically lower levels of life expectancy, but sport and football is well placed to help tackle such issues head on.

## Our vision

Better opportunities  
Better lives

## Our purpose

We use football and the power of SAFC to support and invest in our communities, helping improve the skills, confidence, health and happiness of people, no matter who they are.

## Our values

### Excellence

We are professional and accountable for our actions, and contribute to a high-performing team.

### Passionate

We are proud of what we do and are committed to making a difference.

### Integrity

We are honest, respectful, and inclusive. We care about our colleagues and our community.

### Agile

We adapt to all situations with flexibility and positivity. We are resilient in times of challenge.

### Innovative

We are creative in solving problems and bold in trying out new ideas.

### Collaborative

We work together, encourage diversity, and build strong relationships.





Riding challenges  
together

## What we're going to do over the next 5 years



Our people are facing major barriers  
through no fault of their own.

Poverty remains a significant challenge in our region, with over a third of our communities living in the most deprived 20% of areas nationally. Residents face overlapping issues including low income, unemployment, poor education and skills, poor health, higher crime, and barriers to housing and services.

The impact is clear. Life expectancy is up to 2.5 years lower for men and 2.4 years lower for women than the national average, with healthy life expectancy gaps of up to seven years. Over a quarter of adults are physically inactive, more residents report very bad health, and poor mental health continues to affect opportunities and quality of life.

The digital divide is widening, with many lacking the skills or access needed to fully participate in society. Children are disproportionately affected, with more than a quarter growing up in absolute poverty.



## Focus 1 - Being Skilled

**A level playing field for young people and vulnerable adults to uplift skills, confidence and aspirations.**

By collaborating with our extensive network of partners, such as schools, colleges, local authorities, training providers and industry, we will help people stay in education, be ready for life and work, and progress into apprenticeships, employment or further training.

This will enable communities to benefit from the region's growth and provide them with a sense of belief, purpose and community.

We are here to connect with those who don't fit within traditional models of engagement.

**We will increase attendance in schools and college, reduce those not in education, employment or training and help more people into work.**

### We'll achieve this by:

- Building trusted, long-term relationships that give our people the support and confidence they need to thrive
- Offering exciting, interactive work advice and hands-on experience for the jobs of the future
- Mentoring young people and guiding them into careers, apprenticeships and first steps programmes
- Providing responsible information, advice, guidance, and progression to future opportunities
- Harnessing the power of digital to educate and improve lives
- Provide wrap around services and opportunities to overcome barriers faced

### What does success look like?

- Number remaining or continuing in education
- Rise in sustainable employment
- An increase in people enrolling in apprenticeships
- Meaningful accreditation/ qualifications
- Improved health and wellbeing
- More people with access to digital resources
- People closer to the labour market

## Focus 2 - Being Connected

**Forging a sense of belonging and community cohesion.**

Football is a great leveller, but our work is so much more.

By bringing together partners including local authorities, crime commissioners, the police and voluntary sector agendas, we will cocreate programmes that engage more diverse communities and encourage inclusion.

Our accessible, welcoming spaces can build peace and stability, contribution and participation alongside greater equality.

**We will reduce loneliness, improve health, happiness and life satisfaction and foster friendships and relationships.**

### We'll achieve this by:

- Encouraging families and communities to learn together
- Celebrating diversity and building safe, strong, resilient and inclusive communities
- Ensuring under-represented groups can access fun, developmental opportunities
- Facilitating social activities and friendship groups that build memories and experiences
- Providing new opportunities such as outdoor learning and social action
- Delivering more activities in neighbourhoods that tackle anti-social behaviour
- Delivering inclusive campaigns to mass audiences

### What does success look like?

- Increased social awareness and understanding of others
- Improved resilience and a positive attitude
- People feel safe, valued and connected to the community
- Reduced numbers in the youth justice system
- Increased safer lifestyle choices
- A rise in people volunteering for schemes and initiatives



## Focus 3 - Being Well

**Harnessing sport and physical activity to live well and play well.**

We will engage all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and cultures through a shared love of football and sport.

Leveraging the support of the Premier League, Sport England, other professional sports charities, RISE, and governing bodies to inspire people to get into sport and improve their physical and mental wellness.

Here, and in our neighbourhood's, we will address mental and physical health issues and provide sports and wellbeing sessions that continue to help people live and age well, develop a sense of pride, and build confidence to compete.

**We will increase participation, improve physical activity and strengthen mental wellbeing.**

### We'll achieve this by:

- Supporting people in taking part in age appropriate, adapted and disability sport
- Working to include the economically excluded
- Creating opportunities for women and girls to participate, lead, and thrive in sport
- Promoting talent development opportunities
- Providing safe, accessible places to go, building connections and relationships
- Removing barriers to participation
- Providing access to experiences tournaments and competitions

### What does success look like?

- Consistent participation in Foundation of Light activity
- Increased number of fit, healthy, and happy people
- Rise in people taking part in adapted and disability sport
- Growth in women's and girls activity
- Increased confidence to participate or compete
- Representation at local, regional, national, and international competitions
- Progression to volunteering or work experience

# Our strategic aims

## Being There

A constant, trusted and inclusive presence across our communities in-person and virtually.

### Success:

Triple our reach with one million contact hours each year.

75% participant positive outcomes.

30 minutes to a Foundation of Light in person experience.

## Being Collaborative

Strengthening impact through creative collaboration with our club and other key partners.

### Success:

A new way of working, evidenced with a published Partnership Social Return on Investment Report.

Five active CoLabs.

An engaged network of partners.

## Being Bold

Continuously improving through growth, innovation, learning and ambition.

### Success:

75% of strategic decisions data driven.

Double unrestricted income to fund innovation.

Maintain Exemplary in The Code of Practice.



## A seat at the table



## A strategic ally



On a daily basis, we feel and see the importance and responsibility of doing right by our people and the ones who need it most. This means looking out for everyone and ensuring no one is left behind.

Moving forward, the Foundation will embrace a strategic fit that positions us for maximum impact over the next five years. Stronger together alongside the region's key players, we will be continually analysing the challenges facing people and identifying the root causes.

This will provide a solid understanding to launch initiatives, to grasp arising opportunities and co-produce solutions or joint ventures for long-term change.

By harnessing the love and connection the community has for football beyond 90 minutes, we can build upon trust and loyalty. This will help us to lay strong foundations to act as strategic partners. It will enable us to press on, attracting socially responsible allies, investment opportunities and offering people another reason to be a proud member of our family.

At the core of the strategic outlook is the Beacon of Light, our central hub and the driving force behind a dynamic hub-and-spoke approach. It will once again be a key tool for us moving forward with our five-year plan.

Opened in 2018, the Beacon continues to shine as a thriving hub for learning, growth, and connection for thousands of people each week. The Beacon of Light typifies the vision of the Foundation; a safe, inclusive space where people can access life-changing opportunities in an inspiring facility; a place to belong; a hub for collaboration and innovation.





## A strong foundation to build on



## Our winning edge

As one of the first ever football foundations created in the UK, now is the time to build on our existing strengths.

In the next five years, the Foundation of Light will tackle our priorities by scaling our impact, forging deeper partnerships, attracting new and diversified funding models and driving more efficient delivery.

The solid delivery pillars that underpin our work are diversity, safe spaces, great governance, sustainability and brand.

### Our game changers:

- People and Culture:  
Staff, volunteers, and stakeholder development
- Equality and Inclusion:  
Embedding EDI in everything we do
- Data, Digital and Insights:  
To inform decisions, demonstrate impact and deliver high-quality, future-focused services
- Facilities:  
Maximising value from the Beacon and satellite sites
- Financial Resilience:  
Diversifying income and increasing unrestricted funding





Working together with Sunderland AFC and others, the Foundation will collaborate with partners and harness long-standing relationships to achieve tangible, meaningful and impactful engagement - connecting people through regular, sustained, and high-quality time beyond the pitch.

We have built special relationships with healthcare providers, local and regional governments, education specialists, housing associations, private investors and other major partners, all of which have unrivalled expertise to deliver impactful services to our people, proving we are more than just football. Now is the time to grow our role in the region and beyond.

# ‘Til the end





# Driving forward

The opportunities heading to this region are once in a generation. Our people deserve the chance to be able to take them.

We have made good progress in our communities across Sunderland, South Tyneside, and Country Durham. We have worked with over half a million people over the last 20 plus years, and since the opening of the Beacon of Light, we have welcomed a further one and a half million through its doors.

The Foundation has had many firsts in our history. We have been instrumental in the advancement of women's football. Local participation has grown exponentially in the last decade following the rise of alumni legends such as Jill Scott, Steph Houghton, and Lucy Bronze.

We initiated the first family learning through football programme and built classrooms in the heart of the Stadium of Light.

But there is still more to be done. The Foundation of Light and Sunderland Football Club are instrumental in making tangible inroads into challenges affecting our people.

If we line up on the same team alongside partners, our collective strength, expertise and industrious nature will transform this region and its people with better opportunities for better lives.

Everyone has a part to play in our team. Now is the the time to step up, get involved, and help us turn potential into reality. Join us, and together we'll prove that the world is very much at our feet.










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