

## **CSR in Sport: Investigating environmental sustainability in UK Premier League Football Clubs**

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Despite the growing propensity of sport organisations to engage with CSR, there has been little academic analysis of the role of sport and social responsibility. Little is known about which elements of CSR are being addressed and which aspects can be most successfully addressed by sport organisations. Sport is demanding on the physical environment. Environmentally responsible business practices are an element of CSR in that they are often initiated for reasons other than to make a firm money (but sometimes do), they are not (always) required by law, and they benefit society (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011).

This paper uses research undertaken in the UK Football Industry to explore how Premier League Football Clubs are addressing issues of environmental sustainability in the context of CSR. Professional football clubs certainly recognize that they are an important part of the community and alongside this comes certain relationships with and responsibilities to the community- be it the local population, local authorities, other businesses or the environment. How clubs discharge these relationships and responsibilities and how they manage the inevitable conflicts with the club's commercial objectives is not well understood. This research seeks to understand the nature of these relationships and explores which responsibilities UK Premiership Football clubs are addressing and how. Environmental practices in professional sport are driven by two important considerations – the desire to achieve legitimacy and the strategic or competitive advantages that these types of activities might provide (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). This research seeks to investigate what motivates clubs to achieve such legitimacy and how they may benefit from and seek opportunities arising from better environmental performance.

The paper is based on extensive web based research, and semi-structured interviews with key managers at UK Premier League Clubs

### **Introduction**

Globally, sport is a unique and powerful cultural phenomenon which both unites and divides communities as well as engendering an increasing element of entertainment value (Healy *et al.* 2007). In the UK, football is the highest profile and most popular sport; individual clubs garner a passionate following by their supporters. The Premier League at the top of the four fully professionalized divisions is the most-watched football league in the world<sup>1</sup>. Football is now very much big business with huge investment from wealthy individuals and firms mostly with one thing in mind, profit.

As well as having significant economic impacts, the sport has many social and environmental sustainability impacts. Sport is not immune to the contemporary responsibilities of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.watch-football.net/articles/premier\\_league.html](http://www.watch-football.net/articles/premier_league.html). Retrieved 18 August 2011.

protecting the natural environment. The UN recently indicated that “sport facilities, events, activities and the manufacture of sporting goods have an impact on the environment” (UN, 2007, para. 10). Thibault (2009) stated that “based on the number of sport events held throughout the world, our ecological footprint related to sport is immense and, for the most part, goes unnoticed” (p. 11). Discussing sport’s role in addressing social issues in society, Zeigler (2007) indicated that “society should strive to keep sport’s drawbacks and excesses in check to the greatest possible extent” (p. 302). Environmental sustainability (ES), increasingly recognized as a central aspect of corporate social responsibility (CSR), is important not only for recreational sport firms, but for all sport organisation (Ioakimidis, 2007). As sport becomes an increasingly prominent economic and social institution across the globe, the question of what social responsibilities athletes, coaches, team owners, league officials, and global sport organisation’ personnel have should constantly be asked (Godfrey, 2009).

It is clear that a considerable number of athletes, leagues, teams, and sport organisation have embraced the principles and practices of CSR (Bradish & Cronin, 2009). Yet, while there is significant support for CSR in sport industry practice, corresponding sport management research in this area has received minimal attention (*ibid.*). Academic research into environmental sustainability and sport is also noticeably lacking. The results of a content analysis by Mallen *et al.* (2011) indicated a lack of robust or comprehensive ES research within the sport-related literature.

Given that there has been very little empirical research done on CSR in professional sport, particularly in the area of ES, I believe that it is important to establish a baseline of such efforts. As a starting point, I have taken the English Football Premier League as a research unit to gather data on what CSR programmes have been initiated by the individual Clubs. For the purposes of this paper I will focus solely on the ES efforts of the clubs. Professional football clubs certainly recognize that they are an important part of the community and alongside this comes certain relationships with and responsibilities to the community- be it the local population, local authorities, other businesses or the environment in general. However, how clubs discharge these relationships and responsibilities and how they manage the inevitable conflicts with the club’s commercial objectives is not well understood. This research seeks to understand the nature of these relationships and explores which environmental responsibilities UK Premiership Football clubs are addressing and how this is integrated into the wider response of football clubs to CSR. This research is intended to be exploratory, designed to investigate the key issues and open the door for further research. Given that sport is a growing industry the findings will have a wider relevance to professional sport in general.

Before presenting the results of the research the paper will outline how CSR and ES have been addressed in sport in general and specifically in the football industry.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Sport**

Professional football clubs are hardly different from any other medium-sized, multi-national company; they consist of tangible, financial, and intangible assets that are professionally managed and marketed (Yang and Sonmez, 2005). Hence, football modern management

and governance should not be treated different to other production or service activities (Branston *et al.*, 1999). Extra funding in modern football allows clubs to expand their not-for-profit community activities and to address issues relating to CSR and ES. Healy *et al.* (2007) argue for the principle of stewardship- football clubs must act for the betterment of their host environments and community and in this way carry out their social duties to the common good. Clubs operate in both their local community, and in a more abstract sense, in their league structure.

The growth of CSR within the corporate sector has been paralleled by an increase in CSR behaviour within the sport industry. It can be argued that CSR is an important aspect that is highly relevant for different types of sport organisation. This is in part due to the potential benefits that involvement in sport is said to bring about including improved physical health and psychological health, a reduction in crime, and improvements in community cohesion, social capital, and education. It must be remembered however, that evidence for these benefits is patchy and the processes through which sport is presumed to lead to them are not well understood (Coalter, 2007).

It has been acknowledged that sport is unique for being both a social and an economic institution, and as such, well-suited with this dual orientation to be interpreted by the business principles and practices of CSR (Sheth & Babiak, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Yet, only within the past decade has CSR begun to receive scholarly attention and examination within the sport management discipline (cf. Walters & Tacon, 2011, 2010; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Babiak, 2010; Walker & Kent, 2010; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Godfrey, 2009; Walters & Chadwick, 2009; Breitbarth & Harris, 2008; Walker, Kent, & Rudd, 2007; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Babiak & Wolfe, 2006).

The initial work in this important area has led to the creation of a theoretical foundation and practical orientation of CSR for sport researchers and managers founded on the 'unique' nature of sporting organisation and how this affects the development of CSR in them. Smith and Westerbeek (2007) offer a powerful argument for the potential of CSR and sport, noting the unique features and benefits of what they characterize as 'sport corporate responsibility,' (see table 1). Babiak and Wolfe (2009) also discuss such 'unique' features, suggesting that the following four factors are quite different in the realm of professional sport and are of particular relevance to CSR design, implementation, and impact in sport: passion, economics, transparency, and stakeholder management (see table 2).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mass media distribution and communication power.</li> <li>2. Youth appeal- social responsibility can be exercised with both 'push' and 'pull' support; participation based programmes can encourage involvement, while high profile sports people can provide role models for emulation.</li> <li>3. Positive health impacts.</li> <li>4. Social interaction.</li> <li>5. Sustainability awareness- promotion of a keen environmental responsibility.</li> <li>6. Cultural understanding and integration.</li> <li>7. Immediate gratification benefits.</li> </ol> |
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**Table 1. Unique features of 'sport corporate responsibility' (from Smith and Westerbeek, 2007)**

<b>Passion</b>	Given the passion and interest that sport generates, athletes promoting, for example, healthful living, may generate a larger, more attentive audience than would employees in other fields. More generally, it has been suggested that the passion and identification that sport teams generate can be beneficial to communities as a whole by encouraging and strengthening community integration (Lever, 1983; Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Wilkerson & Dodder, 1987).
<b>Economics</b>	There are some unique economic elements of the sport industry that result in different expectations of sport than of other industries.
<b>Transparency</b>	Almost everything achieved by the leadership and employees of a team is open knowledge (Armey, 2004). Sport organisation may engage in CSR activities as insurance against negative reactions or as an effort to improve their image.
<b>Stakeholder management</b>	Success in the sport industry necessitates the ability to work within a complex set of stakeholder relationships; a team cannot operate without the cooperation of many organisations.

**Table 2. Is Sport unique with respect to CSR? (adapted from Babiak & Wolfe, 2009)**

As well as having ‘unique’ characteristics’, several researchers have noted that professional sport teams and leagues have unique resources available to them to deploy their CSR programmes and generate perhaps greater awareness for social and environmental issues than businesses in other industries might. These resources include: ticket donations; signage; facilities (stadia, arenas); events; access to media, suite holders, vendors, and sponsors; and the professional staff of the team (lawyers, trainers, accountants, and owners) (Sheth & Babiak, 2010).

In their study of how CSR is becoming institutionalized in professional sport Sheth & Babiak (2010) found that sporting executives reported pressures from customers, team employees, corporate partners, and other stakeholders to become increasingly engaged in CSR. On the whole, teams tended to practice what is familiar [i.e., traditional community-relations programmes (e.g., youth sport and school programmes)]; teams tended to be strategically spending their CSR money in areas that matched their core competencies as a business (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). The research also showed that in general (although not significant), as team revenues increased, executives reported more involvement in CSR related activities in their teams.

Breitbarth and Harris (2008) maintain that an increased awareness and integration of CSR into football business fosters the competitiveness of the game and creates additional value for stakeholders. Recent work in the management literature on CSR argues for a more closely aligned fit between a company’s core strategy and its CSR efforts (Bruch & Walter, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2006). These authors contended that it is appropriate for CSR activities to contribute to an organisation’s bottom line and, further, that efforts that contribute to societal beneficiaries and enhance business performance will be more sustainable and add more value for both society and the corporation. While the deployment of CSR through sport offers substantial potential for community return the actual process

for achieving social return from sport is unclear (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). In the context of sport management, it is important to ensure that the interests of multiple stakeholders are considered, but there is a lack of evidence that links CSR practice with the attitudes and behaviour of team stakeholders. More empirical evidence is needed to determine which internal and external pressures lead to greater sport CSR, how these inform the direction and scope of sports teams CSR strategies, and how sports teams can see CSR as an opportunity driven process i.e. what are the benefits to both teams and communities.

### **Environmental sustainability in sport**

Another emerging area of CSR related examination in sport is devoted to environmental sustainability (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Mallen *et al.*, 2009; Ioakimidis, 2007). Sport is demanding on the physical environment. Given the growing role of ES as a focus for corporations across diverse industries it is relevant and pertinent to investigate how major sporting industries such as football address environmental sustainability (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). Socially responsible sport acknowledges this burden and develops policies to avoid environmental damage (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Sports institutions, teams and sponsoring organisations have recognised the need to better understand the environmental impacts of the activities they sponsor, host and regulate. This has been considered alongside debates that have encompassed the social impacts of major sporting events and of associated facilities; for example, including the imposition of costs (noise, congestion, pollution etc.) on existing populations and businesses (see for example, Hiller, 1998; Lenskyj, 2002 and Olds, 1998).

Environmental externalities can be both positive and negative in sport. Football grounds, with their massive water use and high-energy floodlights, are the site of many of the main environmental impacts of most football clubs, while the thousands of fans who travel to big sports events generate huge amounts of waste and carbon emissions travelling and sustaining their big day out. In 2006, the organisers of the FIFA World Cup in Germany voluntarily pursued the goal to reduce some of the environmental impacts generated by the tournament through its Green Goal™ environmental initiative and set specific environmental protection targets. Key issues addressed included the development of more environmentally-friendly stadiums, and improved public transport to encourage supporters to leave their cars at home. President of FIFA<sup>2</sup> Joseph S Blatter claimed that the game (football) had been developed and taken to the world and now it's time to use football to make the world better (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

The natural environment is increasingly being viewed as a pillar of CSR. Research on CSR and environmental sustainability in the management literature is converging because of shared environmental, economic, and social concerns (Montiel, 2008). Regulatory compliance and social responsibility to address environmental impacts are components of corporate environmental management, which Montiel (*ibid.*) argued, is driven by legal and/or social sanctions. However, the underlying thread in the literature on environmental strategy is that through a complex web of constituents, whether customers, shareholders, investors or

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<sup>2</sup> The **International Federation of Association Football** (is the international governing body of association football. FIFA is responsible for the organisation and governance of football's major international tournaments, most notably the FIFA World Cup. From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA>, accessed August 18, 2011.

employees, environmentalism becomes transformed from something external to the market environment to a core objective of the firm. However, the sporting industry in general has been somewhat slower than other industries to adopt environmental management practices and develop CSR strategies. It remains to be seen how central environmental sustainability has become to the core objectives of sporting organisations. This research seeks to investigate how football clubs have internalised environmental imperatives and incorporated them into their corporate strategies; thereby developing core CSR strategies.

Environmental practices in professional sport are driven by two important considerations – the desire to achieve legitimacy and the strategic or competitive advantages that these types of activities might provide (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). This research seeks to investigate what motivates clubs to achieve such legitimacy and how they may benefit and seek opportunities arising from better environmental performance.

## Methodology

23 Clubs were included in this study, the 20 Premier League<sup>3</sup> clubs for the 2011/2012 season including the 3 newly promoted clubs, and the 3 clubs relegated at the end of the 2010/11 season. Promoted and relegated clubs were included to investigate how much difference the gain/loss of Premiership revenue affected a Clubs ability to implement environmental sustainability measures. The research to date is still on-going. This paper is based on the results of the secondary research and interviews with 7 Premiership Clubs.

This research used data from face-to-face and telephone semi-structured interviews as the main source of information. The advantages of conducting semi-structured interviews are that researchers are able to gain a better understanding of context, facilitate the understanding of the motivating rationales behind behaviours and actions, and give a better appreciation of the meanings that an interviewee may attach to a particular issue (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008). The objective of qualitative research is to develop an in-depth contextual understanding of the phenomena that is being studied and to interpret meaning from social situations.

The interviews were triangulated with secondary sources including annual reports, environmental policies, customer charters and website data from all 23 Premiership clubs, in addition to reports from other organisations involved in professional football in the UK. Secondary data of a textual nature can offer access to longitudinal insights published by multiple agencies, helping to facilitate the understanding of processes (Hodder, 1998; Laplume *et al.*, 2008). The triangulation of interview data with secondary data sources offers a richer understanding of cognition and discourse through analyses of text and respondent viewpoints and is an important aspect in order to enhance the breadth and depth of the findings (Denzin, 1970).

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<sup>3</sup> The **Premier League** is an English professional league for association football clubs. At the top of the English football league system, it is the country's primary football competition. Contested by 20 clubs, it operates on a system of promotion and relegation with The Football League. The Premier League is a corporation in which the 20 member clubs act as shareholders. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premier\\_League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premier_League), accessed August 17, 2011.

The interview subjects were selected on the understanding that they would be able to provide information relevant to the research, therefore reflecting a purposive or judgemental sampling technique (Sekaran, 2000; Silverman, 2001). In most football clubs the individual responsible for environmental management will be the stadium or facilities manager. Four of the interviewees held this position, while the other two clubs had a dedicated environmental/CSR manager who was interviewed.

The interviews were then analysed. The interview transcriptions were read in full in order to provide a general understanding of the responses. Then, they were coded according to themes in the interview guide and analysed in reference to the key issues outlined below.

1. Which key environmental issues are being addressed by football clubs and how?
2. What external conditions and internal pressures lead football clubs to address environmental sustainability as a priority?
3. How is environmental information being used by clubs in decision making processes relating to improving their environmental performance?
4. How has environmental management been incorporated into football clubs corporate strategies?
5. What barriers do football clubs encounter in terms of implementing more environmentally sensitive practices?
6. How effective are the methods and strategies used to communicate and engage football supporters in adopting sustainable lifestyle changes?

## Secondary research

The initial stage of the research project involved undertaking a desk top study of secondary materials related to each Premiership Club, also including documents from the FA<sup>4</sup> and the Premiership. This was to see how much information related to environmental and sustainability issues were publicly and easily available. The web site of each Premiership Club was searched, first using general search terms such as environment, sustainability, waste, transport, energy, corporate social responsibility. Then each site was searched for the following documents:

- An annual report
- A CSR/environmental/sustainability policy
- A CSR/environmental/sustainability report
- Customer charter

Each Club was then contacted by telephone and/or email to ask who was responsible for environmental management at the Club, and to request a copy of the Club's Annual Report. The response to these requests was very low. No Club contacted sent a copy of its Annual Report.

Of 23 Premiership (including relegated) Clubs

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<sup>4</sup> **The Football Association**, also known as simply **The FA**, is the governing body of football in England. It is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the game of football in England, both professional and amateur. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Football\\_Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Football_Association), accessed August 17, 2011.

- 7 Clubs made their Annual Reports available on their websites. However of these only 2 date from the last financial year.
- 1 Club has a Sustainability Report available on its website (dated 2009-10).
- No Club has a dedicated Environmental Report available on its website.
- 3 Clubs have a CSR/community review available on their website (although only one is current).
- 3 Clubs had an environmental policy available on their websites.
- One Club had a CSR policy available on its website.
- No clubs had a sustainability policy available on their websites.

The general key word search of Club websites returned very little information in terms of the Club's environmental policies and practices. What little information there was suggested that some Club's are addressing these five areas in terms of environmental sustainability (see table 3).

<b>Waste</b>	In the form of waste reduction schemes, recycling and the use of recycled materials.
<b>Energy</b>	Reduction programmes such as zone-controlled heating and lighting, movement sensors, voltage optimisation equipment.
<b>Water</b>	Minimisation measures such as limiters on taps, bore-hole water sourcing for irrigation.
<b>Transport</b>	Travel plans aimed at increasing the use of public transport to the stadium and reducing the use of cars.
<b>Supply chain</b>	Beginning to implement some local sourcing.

**Table 3. Five key areas of environmental sustainability addressed by Premier League Clubs (from secondary research).**

However the information available was very limited and it was not possible to gain any in-depth insights into the environmental activities of Premiership Clubs from the secondary analysis. Due to the lack of evidence it was difficult to draw any conclusions from the secondary materials. It could be inferred that either Premiership Club's are on the whole not doing very much to address environmental management issues or that they are very poor at communicating what they do. It is however clear that greater transparency from the Clubs is needed on these issues.

### **Primary research**

Several years ago the UK Football Premier League commissioned a report to investigate environmental sustainability in Premiership Clubs. The research into current practice found that sustainability was often considered as a limiting or inhibiting factor: a problem to be overcome. An overriding belief of Clubs was that a Premier League football club exists in the first instance to win football matches as a commercially viable business. There may be some issues that clubs are unwilling to address either because "that's the way it's always been done" or for fear that commercial or on pitch performance will be affected). Other concerns included lack of time and money, media backlash (media interest in the sustainability of football is growing. It is a genuine concern that a club making green claims about one area of activity could be challenged over unsustainable behaviour in another), scepticism,



uncertain future (many clubs are uncertain about elements of their future, which can include relegation fears or possible on-site developments. Such uncertainties can limit investment of time and money to those initiatives which offer a very short term return), lack of skills, and shifting legislation.

## 1. Which key environmental issues are being addressed by football clubs and how?

As we know very little about how UK football clubs are addressing environmental issues due to the scarcity of research in this area, it is key that we understand which issues are being addressed and how. The Clubs view the main environmental impacts of football in three-ways, the inputs, the processes that take place and the outputs.

This quote from a top flight club illustrates which key issues the Clubs believed are the main impacts of Football and are the ones their Clubs need to address.

*‘And as part of that environmental review and audit an Environmental Impact Assessment was done and that identified that our main environmental impact, as you would expect from a business operations sporting Club of our size and scale, revolves around energy, waste, public transport and the supply chain’. (Premiership Club North West)*

Other issues that are addressed to a lesser degree are environmental education, biodiversity and climate change. Four of the Clubs are signed up to the Carbon Trusts Carbon Reduction Programme.

Table 4. presents the consolidated results have of the types of activities undertaken by the clubs in four key categories- waste, energy, transport and supply chain.

Waste	Energy
Measurement of waste inputs and outputs and the amounts recycled. Recycling initiatives such as the recycling of fan waste on all concourses and points around the stadium, bailing and recycling of plastics and cardboard. Involvement of staff and supporters in recycling campaigns. Involvement of Police and Local Authority in supporting waste management and segregation on match days. Use of bio-degradable materials e.g. bio-degradable plastic cups. Working with suppliers to ensure that they only supply materials that are bio-degradable/can be recycled. Reduction of food waste at source. Office buildings built from 80% recycled materials. Turning waste into profit e.g. turning grass cuttings into compost, turning paper waste into insulation, turning glass waste into footpaths.	Measure energy inputs, outputs and performance. Energy conservation and reduction strategies e.g. Saved 42% in energy costs on one site by installing more efficient lighting. Produce annual reports on energy use. Awarding of Carbon Trust Standard for reductions in carbon and improvements in energy efficiency. Looking at installing a biomass energy plant at the training ground. Looking at possibility of installing a wind turbine. Use a part-time consultant to help with energy management. Presence detection lighting in new buildings e.g. training facility.
Transport	Supply chain
Measure pollution, miles travelled, food miles, employee transport, issues related to purchased	Worked with a supplier to purchase bio-degradable plastic cups.

<p>goods.</p> <p>Part of a partnership team forum for Travel to Work initiatives for all the businesses in the area surrounding the stadium.</p> <p>Working with the City Council and the Community Foundation on a new transport plan- promoting walking and cycling to the Stadium (both fans and staff).</p> <p>Possible grants available from the Council to install showers and cycle racks.</p> <p>Developed a transport plan for the new training ground.</p>	<p>Purchase as much as possible from within one mile of their stadium and ask as many as possible of their suppliers to do likewise.</p> <p>Have a Local Procurement Policy (all staff in all departments must adhere to this).</p> <p>Don't deal with suppliers who don't fit in with their sourcing policies.</p> <p>Did have an environmental supply chain partnership initiative with Envirowise<sup>5</sup> (no longer running).</p>
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**Table 4. A sample of the types of environmental sustainability undertaken at Premier League Clubs (from primary research).**

It is important to note that only two of the clubs had any supply chain initiatives of note. Given that supply chain issues, particularly relating to football kits and footballs are some of the more prominent issues related to football none of the clubs were effectively addressing these issues.

Two of the clubs are also addressing issues of biodiversity. One club is working with its Local Authority's biodiversity strategy- planting wildflower meadows and developing community gardens with Schools and neighbours. At their offices and schools around the community they have an eco-garden designed to attract moths, which are in serious decline in the area. At another Club ecology is taught at their Study Support Centre. This demonstrates a link between the

All clubs admitted that while water was a major environmental issue that needed to be addressed due to the heavy usage, only small steps had been taken to conserve water. These measures include measuring water use and basic reduction measures such as limiters on taps and waterless urinals. One club had gone further using reed bed technology at training grounds, bore holes for pitch irrigation, and recycling water for irrigation.

It is clear from the interview data that more is actually done to address ES issues at the clubs than is openly publicized by the clubs- again a lack of transparency and communication. At this time clubs are addressing basic environmental sustainability issues such as waste reduction and pollution abatement, but how far these have moved to the core of their corporate strategies remains to be seen.

## **2. What external conditions and internal pressures lead football clubs to address environmental sustainability as a priority?**

There are several types of pressure that motivates clubs to engage in environmental sustainability. These can be split into two groups- institutional pressures such as societal expectation, other clubs, industries etc, and regulation; and strategic motives such as CSR, financial and values based (see table 5). Not all clubs were subject to the same motivating

<sup>5</sup> Envirowise offers free, independent support to organisation to help them to become more resource efficient and save money. From <http://envirowise.wrap.org.uk/uk.html> accessed August 18 2011.

factors, for several clubs a key driver was the financial gains/savings that could be made, for example reducing energy costs. The clubs that gained the most financially were those that are able to not simply reduce costs, but actually make a profit by maximising opportunities such as turning waste into commercial products. Although costs are a major driver, all clubs agreed that they did what they did because it was 'the right thing to do'.

Motive	Content	Sample Quotation
<b>Conform to Institutional Pressures (legitimacy)</b>	In line with societal norms, values and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'One is we have to be seen and we want to make sure that – we're accountable and Football Clubs are seen as a leading part of the community..... So we have to be seen as doing our bit.'</i> (Premiership Club West Midlands)</li> <li>• <i>'I think what we recognise is that environmentally, with a small 'e', we are very, very much a part of this community. The impact we have on Manchester and its residents and its other businesses is massive and if we behave recklessly, if we ignore those big issues we actually would be flying in the face of that community. We would be treating it with contempt and we would not be representative of a true [REDACTED] neighbour. And that is important to us'.</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> </ul>
	Associative forces i.e. other teams, leisure industry, other sports, supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'I'm very pleased to say that a good number of them [customers] have recognised it and it's great when our hospitality sales team will phone me up and say, 'we've got a potential client who's looking to rent/buy an executive box for this season but before they do so they need to check out our health, safety, environmental and standards as part of their CSR programme, as part of their supply chain auditing programme'.</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> <li>• <i>'...quite a lot of companies when they're looking to hold events they are starting to ask the questions. So now we are able to say, well yes actually we are aware of it, we are dealing with it'.</i> (Premiership Club London).</li> </ul>
	Regulation i.e. government, league	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'I mean the Premier League is really clear about what it's expectations are and realises the impact that football has, and sometimes the negative you happen to have in terms of headlines and, therefore, the behaviours within its membership that really the Premier League desperately tries to develop environmental management awareness behaviour is one of them and good CSR - CSR reporting is absolutely vital and that takes various forms'.</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> <li>• <i>'I think I would say that we did and certainly the way things appear to be heading from a legislative point of view it's going to be a requirement to perform better isn't it'.</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> </ul>
	Internal i.e. company, employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'....the pressure's on ourselves - to always try and improve ourselves – to do that – demonstrate what we're doing and then improving it where we can'.</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> <li>• <i>'We don't have to do it. We do it because we think its right to do. It engages with the community....'</i> (Premiership Club North West)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'We believe that being a responsible Football Club means being part of the community in the wider sense. And we know that our performances as an internationally recognised institution will be measured not only by our success on the field of play or our profitability as a business but also on the impact on the quality of life in the communities and on the environment we share. That is a lead statement and we are practicing what we preach'. (Premiership Club North West)</i></li> </ul>
	Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'So, energy has been a major one because one of the other drivers is financial, of course, because of the costs of energy – two, three years ago the way that it's gone up'. (Premiership Club North West)</i></li> <li>• <i>'...there was a big financial reason because of the amount of energy we were using was so large, we had to look at ways of doing it'. (Premiership Club London).</i></li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Motives</b>	CSR i.e. use environmental sustainability to show leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'...well if [Club] goes green then supporters are more likely to tackle some of the issues themselves because the Football Club is seen as a leader – the front in society'. (Premiership Club West Midlands)</i></li> </ul>
	Financial opportunities/savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'But the flip of it as well is, that if we can reduce usage of electricity and gas and reduce the amount of waste that goes for landfill then quid-pro-co is that we actually save money and it's probably the financial savings are as appealing, if not more, than actually the environmental savings....' (Premiership Club West Midlands)</i></li> <li>• <i>'... when we measure what we do one of the impacts of what we do is that it's cost effective.....reducing landfill, for example, over the last four years has, saved us huge amounts of money. And being aware of things like fugitive energy has saved us tens and tens of thousands of pounds a year in energy costs. And being aware and careful of how we build our properties, the building we're talking in today is 90% was from within four miles of the stadium in terms of manufacture. And of the whole building around 80% of the building is made from re-cycled materials. And the cost of this building was 25% lower than the cost of going down the traditional route'. (Premiership Club North West)</i></li> </ul>
	Image enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'With regard to best practice standards and accreditations, our reputation is being highlighted and broadened and built up as a result of organisations like the Carbon Trust and Envirowise who worked with us very closely for seven years on the supply chain programme... so, reputation, awareness and credibility is also an important factor.' (Premiership Club North West)</i></li> <li>• <i>'....it puts the Club in a good light, people want to know what the Club's doing, we have a big community interest in the Club and so we try to make sure that we do the right thing and it's important that the Club is seen in that way'. (Premiership Club, London)</i></li> </ul>

	Employee motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'...have a staff profit share scheme so when...our Chief Executive, said at the recent staff communication meeting, 'by the way all permanent staff at [REDACTED] are going to receive a percentage of the profits as a bonus, as a thank you, and, by the way, the energy saving campaign has contributed 'X' amount to it – so thanks very much, keep up the good work there's still plenty more to be done. So, actually, it does benefit them by financial reward as well'. (Premiership Club North West)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 5. Internal and external pressures to address ES at football clubs (from primary research).**

The internal values and beliefs of the club are integral to the successful implementation of environmental practices. In three cases this led to the creation of formal environmental policies.

### **3. How is environmental information being used by clubs in decision making processes relating to improving their environmental performance?**

All clubs were quite strong on measuring performance indicators such as energy use, water use and waste inputs and outputs. This allowed them to see where savings and reductions could be made. Those clubs that had a more strategic approach to ES then use these measurements to inform conservation and reduction strategies. One club had undertaken a full Environmental Impact Assessment to identify the key environmental impacts of the club. All but one club performed poorly on measuring transport flows; there is evidently much work to be done in this area.

It is important to note that while the environmental programmes of two of the clubs are fairly well established, the other clubs are really at the beginning of addressing ES. Their activities to date are *ad hoc* and any collection of environmental data is not fully feeding into comprehensive policies and strategies to improve ES.

### **4. How has environmental sustainability been incorporated into football clubs corporate strategies?**

As discussed previously, ES does not appear to be addressed in a strategic way at most UK football clubs. The evidence from the secondary research suggests that any activities that are undertaken are done so on an *ad hoc* basis. Few clubs have environmental policies, and fewer still report on their environmental activities. The interview data confirms this supposition. Four of the clubs reported having an environmental policy. Only one club reported on its environmental activities, which was contained in a wider CSR report. Three of the clubs included information on their environmental activities on their website, but this information was limited. Two of the clubs certainly used environmental information to inform strategies, but neither had a formalised Environmental Management System.

It is difficult to establish from the secondary and interview data how incorporated ES is in clubs' corporate strategies. Certainly where annual reports are available they contain very little information about environmental matters. All interviewed clubs expressed that top-level support for environmental management was strong. While the larger clubs clearly had more support and a strong budget to implement environmental measures, the mid flight clubs were far more subject to financial constraints on their capacity to make ES a key priority. Much of the time environmental measures were implemented only if they could demonstrate good short-term payback.

### **5. What barriers do football clubs encounter in terms of implementing more environmentally sensitive practices?**

Table 6 illustrates the types of challenges the football clubs face when trying to implement ES.

## **6. How effective are the methods and strategies used to communicate and engage football supporters in adopting sustainable lifestyle changes?**

Football is in a strong position to be able to affect and influence people's lives. Its popularity and media focus brings it into the homes of millions. It is clear that football club's do feel that they have a strong role in the community, and part of that role is environmental protection, but they are somewhat lost as to how they can translate their efforts to supporters and influence their environmental behaviour.

Clubs have attempted to engage supporters by getting them involved in recycling campaigns through questionnaires and leaflets, but the success of these initiatives has been limited.

The clubs are very aware that they need to get employees involved in environmental initiatives. The need for the culture of the organisation to be 'right' is very important. It is those clubs that have been able to show how ES directly benefits its employees that have had the most success in engendering a positive environmental culture. For example, one club in the North West of England put the savings that came from energy and waste management (over half a million pounds) back into the community. It was recognised that every member of staff contributed to those savings and some of the money went into the staff charity that pays for events like the Christmas party.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This research, although still at an early stage, demonstrates that football clubs do have a number of negative environmental impacts that are recognised by the clubs management and that clubs are seeking to mitigate these impacts in areas such as energy, water, waste, supply chains and transport. Football Clubs can also have a positive impact on the environment through regeneration and environmental education.

As discussed in the literature review environmental sustainability is a core aspect of CSR (Ioakimidis, 2007; Montiel, 2008). This research seeks to investigate how football clubs have internalised environmental imperatives and incorporated them into their corporate strategies; thereby developing core CSR strategies. The sporting industry in general has been somewhat slower than other industries to adopt environmental management practices and develop CSR strategies, and football is no exception. While clubs are addressing ES, most do so in an *ad hoc*, un-strategic way, with no formalised management systems. A commonly held view was that most UK Football Clubs are not 'big enough' to have a strategic approach to environmental management. This is partly borne out by the fact that it is the larger, richer clubs that have the most developed environmental management programmes. Many clubs in the Premiership are under the shadow of relegation and this can seriously impact on their ability to make ES more strategic. ES is yet to become a core aspect of most football clubs management systems.

Much of the theoretical discussion of CSR in sport has focused on the unique qualities of sports organisations that affects the development of CSR within them (Smith and Westerbeek, 2007; Babiak and Wolfe, 2009). Based on this research, how have such factors



contributed to the development of CSR in football clubs from an ES perspective? Taking Babiak and Wolfe's (2009) four unique characteristics (which also encompass Smith and Westerbeek's (2007) unique qualities) into account how have they influenced the development of ES strategies in football clubs?

**Passion:** It is certainly true that football in the UK has a passionate and loyal following. The potential for football clubs to influence positive environmental behaviour amongst supporters is significant. However, there is little evidence that football clubs exert any such pressure on fans; indeed a limiting factor on developing ES programmes (particularly waste related) is a difficulty in getting supporters involved. Very little pressure to improve ES is actually exerted by supporters on clubs.

**Economics:** In the UK football clubs are perceived as cash wealthy and much conspicuous consumption surrounds the playing, screening and merchandising of the game. Players in particular are perceived as very wealthy. This image of the football club often has negative connotations, particularly from the media. In reality clubs are under severe financial pressures- *'....but there's not too much that's sustainable about Premier League Football Clubs- they only cost you money'..... if you were to look at a business plan for most Football Clubs you'd say, 'it just doesn't stack up'.... If you looked at pretty much every Football Club in the country, and it goes outside of the Premier League as well, only a handful of them actually that have a sustainable business plan'.*

The biggest limiting factor on the development of ES strategies is lack of funding for such projects. The biggest motivating factor for undertaking ES initiatives is efficiency and cost saving measures- *'I'm talking about cost a lot but that's the major driver for any business. We have to be open and honest about it. We'd all like to say that we're putting ourselves out there for saving the planet, but at the end of the day businesses revolve around cost... if there's something that is going to save money and also contribute to saving the planet then that ticks both boxes. The first one we'll want to get ticked is the cost of course'.*

**Transparency:** It is certainly true that Premier League football clubs are subject to intense (and often very negative) media scrutiny, which in turn means that their business affairs are public knowledge. Football teams, by their own admission, are very poor at communicating about their ES efforts; as can be seen by the lack of information on websites and the lack of environmental reporting. Engaging in ES has the potential to improve a football clubs image and reputation, and while clubs do recognise this as a motivating factor its influence is not strong.

**Stakeholders:** Football clubs recognise the importance of numerous stakeholders and the need to balance their often conflicting demands. As table 6 demonstrates clubs often find themselves having to balance a number of conflicting demands, which proves to be a barrier for them to improve ES; how well they manage these conflicts varies. Although football clubs come under some pressure from various sources to improve ES, that pressure is very weak, particularly from governing bodies. Financial imperatives and the need to win football matches are a much bigger priority. Breitbarth and Harris (2008) maintain that an increased awareness and integration of CSR into football business fosters the competitiveness of the game and creates additional value for stakeholders. But in reality while clubs acknowledge

that ES has numerous benefits, fundamentally it won't help them win matches and finish the season at the top of the league. Their core stakeholders- supporters, shareholders and sponsors- want to see them win.

Sheth and Babiak (2010) also suggest that sports organizations have unique resources (e.g. stadiums, events, access to media and sponsors, teams professional staff etc) to aid them in the development of CSR and generate perhaps greater awareness for social and environmental issues than businesses in other industries might. The evidence from this research suggests that football clubs are under utilizing such resources. ES is usually a function of the stadium management, and while in general their efforts reportedly receive good support from top level management, efforts to engage other stakeholders such as sponsors and staff have been limited and fairly unsuccessful. Where such efforts have been successful they have demonstrated how ES can contribute to the clubs overall CSR and also have benefits for staff.

The pressure on sports organisations (like all businesses) to demonstrate effective CSR strategies will continue to grow. While it is clear that football clubs are engaging with this agenda and recognising its importance from a business perspective, the evolution of ES management and its incorporation into core CSR strategy is still at an early stage. A full business case for the development of ES has yet to be demonstrated due to the lack of evidence of the relationship between key stakeholders, motivating factors and potential opportunities. This exploratory research will establish baseline information on what kind of ES measures clubs are implementing and begin to fill some of the gaps in our understanding of the development of CSR in sport.

Barrier	Content	Sample quotation
<b>Resource Constraints</b>	One of the major barriers that clubs face in improving their environmental performance is financial instability and the need to constantly prove that there is a short-term financial pay-back from environmental measures. Most clubs are also subject to time constraints due to a limited amount of personnel being responsible for environmental matters. In the two clubs that had a dedicated environmental manager, these constraints are more easily overcome.	<i>'I think financial is one of them, these things cost money. Like I said we don't have an endless budget. Everyone thinks as a fairly successful football club, a large company you have an endless budget, but we're tight with money on this as much as anything so it makes it quite difficult. So that's probably the hardest one.'</i> (Premiership Club, London)
<b>Waste management issues</b>	Refuse companies are not always flexible with meeting the challenges of match day waste collection and recycling. Educating fans to sort waste effectively and put it in the right bins for recycling has also proven to be challenging for all clubs. Another issue is ensuring that suppliers supply them with recyclable and bio-degradable cups and bottles. One club worked with a supplier, who otherwise would've lost the contract, to develop recyclable lids for bottles to make recycling easier. While for some clubs these barriers can seem insurmountable, the more forward thinking clubs have often managed to turn apparent threats into opportunities.	<i>'...what we found was, although they were put in the programme to say 'look we're having recycling – please help us to do what we would like to achieve'. It would just go in any area, which is difficult for us....Getting them to put rubbish into an actual receptacle, you know!'</i> (Premiership Club, North West)  <i>'...we actually had a huge issue with one of the major soft drinks suppliers about making them change their plastic bottles. That took some doing but we eventually did it'. (Premiership Club, North West)</i>
<b>Conflicts</b>	Clubs often find themselves having to balance a number of conflicting demands, which proves to be a barrier for them to improve ES. -Conflict between stadium usage and expectation and the imperative to save energy and not be wasteful. -Conflict between trying to be environmentally respectful and the image that some in the industry portray i.e. conspicuous consumption. -Conflict with other departments within the club because the environmental imperatives do not fit with their needs. -The contradiction between needing to invest in technology that improves the playing of the game e.g. lighting rigs that allow grass to grow all year and the negative environmental impact of such technology i.e. heavy increase in energy use. -Effectively operating two separate businesses- the stadium and its conferencing facilities and then match days. The two require very different planning with regards to e.g. waste management.	<i>'Growing grass on the pitches in winter is a difficult thing to do and, therefore, we have these huge numbers of sun lamps basically to grow the grass and that's my biggest conflict....because you're just constantly at odds with our ground staff who desperately want to grow grass because that's our core business and it doesn't grow between October and about March without aid but the amount of energy and stuff that those lamps use is unbelievable'. (Premiership Club, North West)</i>  <i>'...we live in an industry in football where lots of people drive very large cars.....We send out messages about being environmentally respectful but yet some of the people that are in your face basically are driving the biggest gas guzzlers on the planet.... All we can do is try and do things another way to offset that'. (Premiership Club, North West)</i>

<b>Lack of support and guidance</b>	There was very little evidence that the clubs received any support or guidance on environmental issues from the sport's governing bodies (The FA and Premier League), they believed communication from them on these issues to be poor. Support from other organisations is also lacking, UK football does not appear to have been effectively captured by the environmental agenda. Some clubs received some support and guidance from local organisations and councils, but the provision of support is very patchy.	<i>'...it would be good to maybe have some guidance– more than just somebody writing a document. Maybe we get audited in certain ways by people from the Premier League. Maybe they ought to have somebody that did that from an environmental sustainability perspective'. (Premiership Club, West Midlands)</i>
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**Table 6. Barriers to the implementation of ES at football clubs (from primary research).**

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