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# **The Organisation of Community Football, A Barrier to Environmental Change**

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### *Rationale/Purpose*

The aim of this research was to identify the extent of, and barriers, to pro-environmental activity within community-based, association football clubs in England

### *Design/Methodology/Approach*

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with volunteers at community football clubs in the FA county of 'North Country'.

### *Findings*

The ownership and management of football facilities provides for a low level of independent decision making by clubs and negates the encouragement of pro-environmental activity.

### *Practical Implications*

Strategies for increased environmental activity in football need to look beyond individual clubs and volunteers to the way the sport is organised.

### *Research Contribution*

This research adds to a football and environment literature in its infancy and expands consideration of the non-professional sector of the game in academic work.

Keywords: football, environment, behaviour, community

## **Introduction**

That the climate is changing is indisputable (IPCC, 2018). In England, the expectation is for more severe flooding, more heatwaves in the summer and added pressures on the natural environment (Committee on Climate Change, 2015). There is widespread agreement that the response to climate change will necessitate changes to existing lifestyles as current patterns of consumption are simply unsustainable (Shove, 2010).

The predominant narrative for achieving this change is to modify the behaviour of individuals (Hargreaves, 2012). This is defined as "behaviour that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world" (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, p.240). Early theories on influencing behaviour concentrated on supplying information, to increase individual knowledge, anticipating that environmental education would lead to positive activity. These 'information deficit' models were soon proven to be flawed (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Research into behaviour now embraces many different models, including a large range of factors considered internal to the individual (for example, attitudes, values and personal norms), external (for example, fiscal incentives, regulation and social norms) or a combination of both (Darnton, Elster-Jones, Lucas & Brooks, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Prager, 2012). Individual behaviour promotion remains the favoured approach of policy makers in subjects as broad as health (Kelly & Baker, 2016), and as specific as reducing car use (Spotswood, Chatterton, Tapp & Williams, 2015).

However, there are critics of this approach (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove, 2010; Wilson & Chatterton, 2011), with suggestions it is too individualistic, too rationalist, and insufficiently critical of the status quo. Monitoring and attempting to mitigate climate change are potentially beyond the scope of simple behavioural interventions and "likely to involve dramatic changes in social organisation" (Szerszynski & Urry, 2010, p.1). The suggestion is

that a focus on individuals avoids difficult questions about the social, economic and political influences on people's lives (Kelly & Baker, 2016) and the need to adopt "new forms of living, working, and playing" (Shove, 2010, p.1273).

Sport is a highly relevant forum for examining the continued validity of individual behavioural interventions. Widely acknowledged as a 'good', with participation valued by governments (Manzenreiter, 2015), the suggestion that physical activity can help combat health problems, crime and social exclusion is familiar (Downward & Rasciute, 2010). Sport reaches large populations and offers a highly visible stage for promoting messages that seek to influence environmental behaviour (Casper & Pfahl, 2015). Yet it also registers significant and measurable impacts on the environment, with scientific methods at the heart of its landscape management and economic activity throughout its organisation (Casper & Pfahl, 2015). Transport to sports venues cause challenges before a ball has been kicked or bowled (Wicker, 2019). Additionally, there are the effects caused by sport's demand for products supporting its operations, and the use of resources to create them.

Football is the global game (Goldblatt, 2019), and the sport of consumption (Sandvoss, 2003). Football's environmental footprint is considerable, through the emissions and resource use associated with its facilities (Dosumu, Colbeck, & Bragg, 2014). It also offers an important mass participatory role and is a highly emotive sport with a social, economic and cultural reach far beyond many others. England is home to the oldest Football Association (FA), the longest established clubs and, in the FA Cup, the most historic national competition in the World. Over half a million people aged sixteen years and over are members of a football club, and over 2 million participate in the sport at least twice a month (Sport England, 2018).

This paper examines individual pro-environmental behavioural in the mass participation, community sector of football. This is the level that most of the living, working and playing of the sport occurs, where it is what Walvin (2001, p.252) calls “just another feature of life’s weekly routines”. Despite the environmental crisis demanding these routines change, this research identifies little existing work on the environment in the football literature, and a very narrow approach in promoting behaviour change using information deficit thinking within English football. This approach is examined through interviews with those expected to enact change at the grassroots level, a sample of community football volunteers. The results highlight that the ownership and management of facilities, and the demands on volunteers, have made information provision largely redundant and negated individual behaviour as a means of significantly improving the sport’s pro-environmental activity. It concludes that alternate thinking, that considers how we organise and engage in the sport of football, is necessary.

### **Sport, Football and the Environment Literature**

The sport and environment literature is relatively small (Dingle, 2016; Mallen, 2018; Trendafilova & McCullough, 2018) and has developed without cohesion (McCullough, Orr & Kellison, 2020). That is changing with the creation of a sub-discipline in ‘Sport Ecology’ (McCullough, Orr & Kellison, 2020), greater co-ordination across the sector and an expanding research base. There are now studies of strategies promoting individual environmental behaviour (for example, Casper, McCullough & Pfahl, 2020; Ruttly et al. 2015; Trail & McCullough, 2018), consideration of the role of organisations in mitigating sport’s environmental impact (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2018), sport resilience to climate change (Dingle & Stewart, 2018; Orr & Inoue, 2019) and the ‘greenwashing’ of sport by its administrators (Miller, 2017). And yet, there remains a gap (Trendafilova & McCullough, 2018) between the more diverse work being done by academics and the measures being taken

by sport administrators and organisations. Acknowledging these efforts whilst critically evaluating the measures taken can help develop change (McCullough, Orr & Watanabe, 2020).

Football exhibits numerous gaps. Football is rarely used as a data source in academic studies. The football literature records little on the environment. The *Routledge Handbook of Football Studies* (Hughson, Moore, Spaaij, & Maguire, 2016) contains 40 chapters documenting many social, political and cultural aspects of the game, the environment is not one of them. A companion title, the *Routledge Handbook of Football Business and Management* (Chadwick, Parnell, Widdop, & Anagnostopoulos, 2018), goes further, with 47 chapters, yet still does not offer one on the environment. *Soccer and Society* devoted an entire issue (Volume 17, Issue 6, 2016) to the challenges facing youth and junior level football yet did not include management of their environment.

There is some research relating to the relationship between the community and its local professional football club (Brown, Crabbe & Mellor, 2008) and the stadia they occupy (Bale, 2000). Other work has sought to use the medium of a professional football club or event to measure impacts on the environment, economics or society (for example, Baldwin, 2010; Collins & Flynn, 2008). There is also discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in professional football (for example, Hamil & Morrow 2011; Reiche, 2014; Walters & Panton, 2014). Yet, CSR encompasses many other aspects of activity, and the difference between the finance, resources and aims of a highly select group of commercial organisations and the majority of those involved in the sport renders simple transfer of this knowledge inappropriate. A decade ago Collins and Flynn (2008) noted that the environment was beginning to be recognised at an international level of football, but since then it appears little attention has been directed towards its study and even less work has filtered down the

football pyramid. Such focusing of research on the higher echelons of the game leads O'Gorman (2016, p.793) to conclude there is a "bias" towards professional football and "a relative academic neglect of football at youth and junior grassroots level". This is magnified in the case of environmental research.

This relative lack of representation of the environment in football literature is mirrored in the strategy and guidance within football in England. The FA says that sustainability has been a key issue for them since 2007 (FA, 2020) and to this end they employ a sustainability team. However, they focus attention on the things they do in respect of their direct impacts as an employer and venue manager, and not the impacts of the game of which they are custodians. The organisation that funds facility improvements in the sport is the Football Foundation, and they state a desire "to encourage potential Football Foundation grant applicants to consider the environmental impact of their proposed projects and how this might be reduced" (Football Foundation, 2011, p.1). This includes mention of energy, water and pollution, but does not offer specific advice, merely encouragement to consider those subjects. Sport England, the public body tasked with developing community sport, has developed a 'Sustainable Clubs' website, to provide "guidance to help community sports clubs use environmental sustainability to reduce their running costs" (Sport England, 2020). This amounts to an energy calculator, tool for identifying impacts and options, case studies and links to funding. As Jenkins and James (2012) found, even at the Premier League level of football there are no codes of conduct or specific instructions relating to environmental behaviour. The simple promotion of the subject and lack of guidance on environmental management contrasts with an abundance of detail, and funding, provided by football authorities on how to achieve a higher quality playing surface (FA, 2009). These measures are the promotion of individual behavioural theory at its most basic, the supply of information to encourage self-help and



choice. Critically evaluating this approach and identifying whether alternative perspectives may be more useful informed the methodology of this study.

The aim of the research was to identify the extent of pro-environmental behaviour in community football clubs, the potential for increasing that behaviour and any barriers to it. This was achieved by interviewing, and analysing data provided by, community football club volunteers. The intention was to examine the results alongside existing work on behaviour and sport to develop strategies to improve community football's pro-environmental activity.

## **Methods**

### ***Research Population***

There are 92 professional football clubs in the top four divisions in English football, but approximately 20,000 other affiliated clubs in the nation (FA, personal communication, December 7, 2020) in the sport. Non-professional clubs may not attract as many supporters as the elite game, but they can still count attendees in the hundreds, if not thousands, per week and the cumulative figure makes for a significant impact on resources and emissions. As many of these clubs are also lacking the exposure and rewards potentially available to those in the highest leagues the challenges facing them are among the most acute. Most of these clubs are best described as 'community football clubs'; typically, non-profit organisations, relying on volunteers for management of their operations, hosting junior football teams comprising young people from their immediate locality. Of the 40,000 football pitches in England, more than 33,000 (n=82.5%) are educational establishment or local authority owned, with almost 19,000 football pitches used purely for children's football (Sport England, 2017). This football is provided for the community, by the community and while few headlines would be written were one club to close, the state of the game would be very different without their collective numbers.

North Country FA (an anonym) is one of the English FA's units of administration, a county FA. North Country FA usually ranks between 10th and 15th (out of 48 county FAs) in terms of size (n=823 adult teams, n=1630 junior teams). The level of public ownership of football facilities is slightly higher in North Country (n=88%) than the national average, with 1100 of the area's 1250 pitches being sited at either local authority or educational establishment venues (Sport England, 2017).

### ***Data Collection***

Clubs and initial contacts were identified using the North Country FA handbook in a purposive sample that considered representation from the seven local authorities operating in the region. Semi-structured interviews with club personnel were proposed as they are a highly effective method for providing detailed exploration of a topic, unmatched in this by any other method of data collection (Amis, 2005). There were 30 clubs initially contacted, none of their personnel declined to be interviewed, yet not all of them could be due to the difficulty of finding a suitable time amidst their existing commitments. This identification of the population as 'time-poor' highlighted a potential barrier to pro-environmental initiatives. Eight interviews were held with eleven people representing six community football clubs. The ninth interview, at the request of the interviewee, was a group discussion with 25 members of their club. The clubs were located in five of the seven local authority areas. A pilot interview was undertaken with a volunteer from a community football club in a different county FA to North Country.

The interviews asked volunteers to identify; the organisation of the club, the extent of pro-environmental activity within it, whether the promotion of individual behaviour change within football was succeeding at that club and any barriers to increasing their activity. As McCullough (2013) demonstrates, a schedule of questions can be organised in advance of

each interview to capture attitudes, norms and behavioural controls in relation to sport and the environment. Other questions were included to contextualise responses and allow for the analysis of features of the club, the system they operate in and any external factors that may impact upon their activity.

The capability, reliability and credibility of the interviewer may be identified by a declaration of existing skills and training, their trustworthiness linked to their technical ability and the extent of their sporting background (Biddle et al., 2001). The interviewer had appropriate competency in these areas due to employment history, qualifications, and previous experience of such work. The interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed in accord with British Sociological Association (BSA) guidelines and the conditions of ethical approval. No sponsorship of the work was sought, and no objections or refusals were received from any North Country FA personnel.

### *Data Analysis*

Qualitative analysis of the transcribed interviews was undertaken in accordance with techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994); use of field notes and reflections from interviews with associated coding; organisation of these into similar patterns, themes, phrases and relationships; elaboration of any small set generalisations and response to these with any formalised theories or constructs. A summary of the interview condensed into key points to help avoid overload (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was sent to each interviewee for confirmation of accuracy and the opportunity to add to the information provided. No changes were requested by interviewees, confirming the credibility and dependability of the results. Other aspects of the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are challenged by the absence of additional work researching football and the environment, particularly at the community level. However, use of a singular method for capturing data is well-

established in sport ecology (for example, surveys by Casper, Pfahl & McSherry, 2012; Inoue & Kent, 2012, and interviews by Kellison & Hong, 2015; McCullough, 2013).

While ‘Saturation’ is a problematic term that should not be used as a self-determined fixed point to signal the end of research (Saunders et al., 2018), the eleven interviewees and the group provided very similar responses to questions of environmental activity and a diminishing series of returns relating to external factors was encountered. Expanding the research sample to a size able to satisfy some external expectations of representation and validity in some methods (Biddle et al., 2001) would be impractical given a potential research base of thousands of clubs, and the number of interviews completed in this study is commensurate with other studies in this field (for example, Baldwin, 2010).

## **Results**

### ***Club Demographics***

All the interviewees said their clubs had been in existence for a relatively long period of time (see Table 5.1). The interviewees themselves had been involved with their club for between four and fifty-three years. All the interviewees were volunteers, all were male, and all occupied managerial roles at their clubs with budgetary responsibility. These points are potentially relevant to the data; Stern et al. (1999) include altruism as a behavioural influence, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) note a link between gender and pro-environmental activity, and Cary (2008) suggests challenges in achieving environmental goals with a voluntary behavioural agenda. McCullough and Cunningham (2010) report that the pressures and impetus to change could be lacking in established sports clubs. Their suggestion is that practices such as promoting a winning ethos may have become entrenched, with a lack of new stakeholders leaving the status quo unchallenged, helping perpetuate policy failures, such as poor environmental performance. This suggests that had these interviews included a

volunteer at a more recently established club they may have provided alternative thoughts on pro-environmental activity due to the absence of such institutionalised thinking. However, interviewees described the difficulties in sustaining a club in the initial years of creation, so there is doubt as to whether a thriving, recently established club that does not pursue standard practices could be found. In contrast to McCullough and Cunningham's (2010) observations, it seems possible that North Country is witnessing not entrenchment by clubs, but entrenchment of clubs, in the organisational structures and relationships that exist in community football.

All the interviewees identified their club as affiliated to either FA Charter Standard or FA Charter Community Standard. This affiliation has implications for features of the club environment, for example compliance with the rules concerning the type and size of playing surface. However, the Charter Standard does not specify that a club must possess a specific organisational structure or how, and from where, the playing space is obtained. A club that lives a 'nomadic' existence in terms of not having use of a regular 'home' pitch can satisfy the demands of affiliation whereas one with its own modern stadium may not meet the criteria. The absence of organisation and ownership criteria in FA affiliation was reflected in the data collected from club interviewees.

### ***Ownership and Organisation of Club Sites***

Interviewees described a variety of organisational structures (n=4) amongst a relatively small group of clubs (n=7) (see Table 1). These I define as the '*club organisation model*' and comprised: a charity; community association; constituent member of sports and social club and four not for profit, single sport clubs. These models of club meet their playing requirements through even more varied means, with only two clubs fulfilling fixtures in the same manner (see '*playing fulfilment models*' in Table 1). In addition, all clubs utilised what

are known as central league venues, designated sites that host matches in a specific league.

This may mean that a club has an entire age group never playing a home match as they are in the league scheduled at the central venue. Not only may this impact the relationships these groups have with their club, community, and the land they use, it causes transport difficulties and additional journeys where a family has two or more children of different ages involved in football matches taking place at different locations.

Emulating the different club organisation and playing fulfilment models, the buildings found at each club varied, and quite substantially in both size and facilities (see Table 1). In defining a '*building usage model*' I am identifying 'full' facilities as comprising a series of changing rooms with showers, toilets, a kitchen, communal areas and a meeting room, 'minimal' facilities represents the basic requirements that are mandated by the rules assigned to that competition's fixture (usually a toilet and changing areas).

<i>Club</i>	<i>Founded</i>	<i>Number of teams</i>	<i>Club Organisation Model</i>	<i>Playing Fulfilment Model</i>	<i>Building Usage Model</i>
1	1957	20	Charity	At the club's owned site	Shared use of a commercially rented building with full facilities managed by a paid employee
2	1955	23	Community association	At the club's long-term leased site	Use of a local authority owned large building with full facilities
3	2002	20	Not for profit single sport club	On pitches leased annually from the local authority	Minimal facilities at pitchside

4	1980	30	Not for profit single sport club	On pitches rented from a commercial provider	Commercial arrangement with education establishment with minimal facilities
5.	1982	20	Not for profit single sport club	On a site provided through 'grace and favour' by the local authority	Shared use of small local authority building with minimal facilities
6	1998	21	Constituent member of sports and social club	At the club's owned site	Shared large building with full facilities managed by a paid employee
7	Late 1990s	6	Not for profit single sport club	On pitches hired ad hoc from the local authority	Minimal facilities at pitchside

Table 1 Summary of Models Identified by Each Interviewed Football Club

The type and quality of pitch facilities offered by the land arrangements varied because ownership impacts the resources available to manage them. For example, an infrequently used local authority owned grass pitch in a region with many natural turf amenity areas may be mown at a series of fixed intervals or as time and budget allows, whereas a club owning a single pitch may have a volunteer groundsperson performing tasks more regularly. As club interviewees attested;

Each pitch is cut twice per week (Interviewee A at Club 1)

The pitch is cut every two weeks or so (Interviewee B at Club 5)

Only at three of the clubs in the study were pitches managed wholly by the club. At another two there is club involvement in match specific tasks such as line marking but the turf maintenance, practices involving fossil-fuel driven machinery, fertilisers and chemical applications, is undertaken by the local authority. This is significant, as it means most of the clubs in these interviews cannot alter pitch-based environmental activity, and the type and frequency of natural turf management can negate its positive carbon sequestration (Kong, Shi & Chu, 2014). Altering the behaviour of individuals at more than half of the community football clubs in the sample would not impact the environmental impact of the pitches. Personal factors that have been identified and are promoted as relevant to pro-environmental behaviour, such as rational choice, awareness, intentions, values and norms (Jackson, 2005) are all subject to the ability to exercise decision making, which interviewees at these clubs do not have.

Further restriction is evident in the arrangements for building usage, where no club owned a building or had licence to manage it. The significance of buildings in pro-environmental behaviour is clear with their use of energy, water and potential emissions and waste. Once again, the behavioural cues that rely on individual power to modify this use were nullified by its absence. For example, Club Two is unable to alter its gas consumption because their volunteers have no access to the heating system, it is remotely controlled by the local authority. This situation, the routinised behaviour of individuals in an established structure with existing practices, is best typified by the response of an interviewee at a club in such circumstances;

Whatever the council say we've got to go with (Interviewee A Club 7)

We tried to cut it ourselves, but with it being local authority land we were kicked off it  
(Interviewee A Club 5)



Despite identifying these restrictive relationships in ownership and management of club sites individuals may still have attempted to initiate pro-environmental activity or caused negative impacts that could potentially be negated. Consequently, it was important to identify the extent of any relevant activity within clubs.

### *The Extent of Club Pro-Environmental Activity*

The data showed that very little positive environmental behaviour was undertaken at clubs, something interviewees acknowledged and detailed (see Table 2);

There's a massive scope of what we could do that we don't currently do (Interviewee D Club 1)

I don't think we as a club does as much and society as much as we should really (Interviewee C Club 2)

<i>Pro Environmental Activity</i>	<i>Clubs (n=7)</i>
Car sharing	4
Motion sensors for lighting	2
Green waste recycling	2
Glass recycling	1
New boiler fitted	1
New windows fitted	1
Submission of a travel plan	1

Table 2 Club Interviewee Responses Regarding Football Club Activities Relating to Pro-Environmental Activity

Transport was the most frequently mentioned aspect of club environmental activity, yet all interviewees suggested this was something done to reduce personal expenditure on fuel rather than for environmental reasons. Mini-buses for teams travelling to away fixtures were cited by some as having been used in the past but none of the clubs will do so now due to safety concerns, cost of insurance and the minimal impact they have on the number of vehicles travelling. As one interviewee said;

If you said to me there's a free van for you, I wouldn't want it as I wouldn't want the responsibility (Interviewee B at Club 5)

Of interest was that interviewees only mentioned acting positively as a means of improving their pro-environmental behaviour, they did not suggest reducing activity could be beneficial. As one interviewee noted;

Maybe we need to be more pro-active in the small things, like I said about the plastic bottles, if we just had a bin outside that says put your plastic bottles in here please and they went to recycling. That's a start. (Interviewee C Club 2)

Yet recycling waste can be a challenging task. Far easier, and in keeping with the concept of a waste hierarchy, is to try to lower consumption. Discussion revealed there were other club activities that registered impacts on the environment that could be subject to reductions; for example water and energy use. However, it is difficult to promote these as behavioural changes because of the third party (local authority) involvement in the clubs and what appeared to be the lack of environmental consideration in their management. Thus, the emphasis on encouraging individual behavioural change by football's advisory bodies is

misguided as it is the sport that registers the impacts, and arrangements for provision of the sport that shape decision-making. The data from these interviews identifies that individuals at representative clubs have very little involvement in the management of facilities and so targeting them for altered behaviour without broader change in the sport will fail.

### ***Club Ambitions***

To appreciate whether ownership and management was the sole limiting factor for activity the interviewees were asked about their club ethos and ambitions. All the interviewees suggested altruistic reasons, and none mentioned playing success. Offering children an opportunity to play and enjoy a sport in a safe and well-run organisation was the aim;

To keep young children on the straight and narrow (Interviewee B Club 2)

To get children off the street and off their computers, playing with their feet and not playing with their thumbs (Interviewee A Club 5)

Indeed, comments regarding ambitions were often very simple;

To stay in existence (Interviewee A Club 3)

To tackle whatever is thrown at them (Interviewee A Club 2)

This challenge of staying in existence had altered dramatically over the last decade according to Interviewee A at Club 2. Another interviewee (A at Club 5) linked their lack of a home pitch, and the playing fulfilment and building usage models, as being fatal to any ambitions beyond survival. Some clubs did suggest more specific objectives, such as to grow the participation of girls in junior football, to run the organisation transparently and with financial sustainability and to develop people as individuals. Only one interviewee (A at Club

1) specifically mentioned a business plan, a series of intentions to develop coaching provision, restore aspects of the surroundings and enhance community provision. Within this was the only mention of the environment by anyone in this part of the interview and came from the club who enjoyed possibly the most favourable models of playing fulfilment (owned pitches) and buildings usage (full facilities), perhaps giving them the increased security to make these longer term aims denied to the interviewees from other clubs.

Asking the interviewees what would encourage or enable them to act more pro-environmentally brought a clear division of responses. For those clubs who can be classed according to the playing fulfilment and buildings usage models as being without a 'home' ground or facilities, the consensus was that there was little that could be done. With no land under their control, they believed they had no means of impacting the level of pro-environmental activity;

I don't think there's anything I can think of (Interviewee A Club 5)

To have our own pitch and clubhouse, that's the only way, but that's not going to happen  
(Interviewee A Club 7)

Those clubs with the playing fulfilment and buildings usage models that do have a 'home' ground with facilities offered possible solutions. These ranged from changes that would be considered relevant to pro-environmental behaviour models. Knowledge and awareness were mentioned by some;

Someone to come down and explain the whole process and how it would benefit us  
(Interviewee D Club 1).

I have to say it's not something I've given a lot of thought to (Interviewee C Club 2)

This offers potential encouragement to the promotion of individual behavioural strategies, as interviewees identified personal gaps in knowledge, attitude, and intention. However, such suggestions that information provision may help were followed by questions as to what benefit the club would accrue from such activity and caveats pointing out that an appreciation of the possibilities of pro-environmental behaviour would not independently offer opportunities for that behaviour;

The only issue would be financing it (Interviewee D Club 1)

Whether it would cost more to use the environmentally friendly material that may be an issue, if the costs went significantly up (Interviewee B Club 2)

The site lends itself, absolutely, for wind and solar power, but we need money, and a willingness from the council to share a long-term plan with us (Interviewee A Club 2)

Finance was frequently mentioned in relation to ambitions. Interviewees provided data on membership fees, allowing for the calculation of an average annual income of £108 per player. This figure was confirmed by one of the clubs as being "about right" (Interview C Club 2) and would provide a club of 300 players with an annual revenue of £32,400. The total costs associated with a home ground vary depending on the facilities but examples of the type of work given by interviewees in this position included a sum of between £8,000-11,000 per annum for turf pitch maintenance (club 7), a building rental cost of £30,000 per annum (club 1) and £84.50 per month for waste collection (club 2). For one club, the cost of waste collection for the year was equivalent to the revenue raised by subscriptions from ten players. The income earned from those playing football in these club models simply does not cover the cost of providing that football. Indeed, one interviewee asked to keep our

discussion relatively short as the club was charged on an hourly basis for the venue they utilised. It is little surprise this group do not feel able to raise club ambitions beyond survival.

The interviewees were given opportunity to provide their views on any other aspect of the organisation of community level football. Despite being at the end of the interviews and beyond the prepared questions, these responses were of far greater significance than anticipated because the interviewees seemed to relax and the open nature gave them a chance to comment on the issues important to them. No interviewee offered positive thoughts, they all provided negative remarks about the state of football as they currently experienced it. The common theme was the difficulty in running a football club, from the cost of the sport;

The future of grassroots sport on the whole is in danger unless the government and the Premier League teams, especially the Premier League teams, start filtering money down to grassroots level and giving us a chance (Interviewee B Club 6)

To the lack of awareness of this cost by parents seeking to involve their children;

I don't want to tar all with the same brush but at least half [of parents] don't know what goes on (Interviewee A Club 1).

Every club interviewee acknowledged that without sponsorship and fundraising they simply would not be able to continue. Discontent was directed towards national governing body decisions and the people responsible for setting practices relating to funding and coaching. Subjects spoken of included; the financial implications of a decision to number football shirts, changes to player registrations, and rules introduced to regulate player appearances. These contributed to what one interviewee declared was;

### Taking the smile away (Interviewee A Club 7)

There was a feeling from some interviewees that there had been a rise in the levels of competition and unrealistic expectations on children. Some parents' behaviour when spectating was seen as poor and unnecessarily aggressive, what one interviewee called;

### Alarming levels of disrespect (Interviewee C Club 2)

Other club interviewees provided similar suggestions of a poorly behaved minority of spectators, with both groups providing examples of when certain facilities and services had been withdrawn due to threatening behaviour from the parent of a footballer. One interviewee indicated he was close to withdrawing from his voluntary service because of these issues. Not only could this impact the extent to which these volunteers wish to further their service by adopting pro-environmental changes, but any initiatives that rely on individual-centric, parent or spectator involvement, such as alterations to transport or match day waste recycling, could be undermined by such responses to club efforts.

The introduction of nine player team football was a development mentioned by all interviewees. This form of the junior game is part of a plan identified by the FA's drive towards higher standards (FA, 2013) and is mandatory at under 11 and under 12 age groups, and optional at under 13. The size of pitch the FA specify must be used for matches is unique and it is this regulation and control of the playing environment that causes challenges. Due to local populations and membership numbers a club may only have one team in a nine per side age group, therefore a piece of land must be found to host a small number of matches whilst potentially more numerous teams in other age categories have to be organised on what land

remains. To try and adapt alternative sized pitches to the dimensions mandated for nine players would result in wear across certain sections of the pitch and near constant re-marking of the lines. According to the interviewees what typically happens is that nine player teams play on hired sites or central venues, never appearing at their own home ground or the same location as their fellow club members. Not only does this use additional land in creating a sports landscape that in Bale's (1994, p.10) words is “not natural”, the nine per side pitch is an imposition on football clubs, creating numerous logistical difficulties for organisers and parents, diluting any link that group of young players and spectators may have with their home environment.

It is difficult to ascertain what interviewees would do were they to have ownership of their facilities, but their responses suggest they would continue to be challenged by both finance and the prioritisation of other aspects of running a football club. They report the challenges of maintaining solvency, ensuring compliance with regulations, prioritising child safety and attempting to secure a home. Clubs do not set out to harm their landscapes but in contrast to work emphasising the urgency of the issues of climate change and environmental damage (Vlek & Steg, 2007), the interviewees taking part in this stage of research see other concerns of greater importance and the lack of power they have has fostered a sense of helplessness.

## **Conclusion**

The data identify that club interviewees are experienced football volunteers, representing established organisations, drawn from a variety of locations. As such they offer a knowledgeable base of experience and a rich source of data across all conceivable models of community football club organisation. The interviewees revealed that the ability of their clubs to effect change was highly restricted by the existing arrangements of land ownership and management, and further pressured by the requirements of affiliation to the national



governing body. Where clubs do not own or control land or buildings the concept of individual behaviour is largely redundant. Efforts to discuss pro-environmental change were repeatedly met with resignation at the lack of power at interviewees disposal. For most of the clubs, there is no stewardship of the land they use for football, and a suggestion that Relph's (1976) idea of 'placelessness' has taken hold. Even the clubs that either own or have a long lease on their pitches have no ownership of their buildings and that seems to foster a sense of helplessness in the face of dependence on others and financial pressures. This feeling is exacerbated by governing body decisions on the administration of the game that can have far-reaching implications at the voluntary level.

Some club interviewees believed there were things their clubs could potentially do to enhance their environment given a different ownership model. In these cases, they perceive a lack of awareness or knowledge could act as a possible barrier to improvement. However, resolving the questions of ownership and control, and engaging in club education, would not immediately empower volunteers to begin work on pro-environmental schemes. In allowing interviewees to raise topics they considered relevant to the state of community football they revealed the extent of pressures on their clubs. Whether it was complaints about the influence of professional football on player and spectator behaviour, or the need to complete tasks in respect of the club's FA status, these responses were a list of the attitudes, burdens, priorities and state of their experience of football. Behaviour in respect of the environment did not feature at all, it simply does not exist in their current considerations of organising the sport. This has parallels with a survey of professional sports organisations (BASIS, 2011) where it was found that, for most respondents, operational requirements take precedence over environmental concerns. For someone engaged in an environmental movement or producing environment-based literature there may be no bigger issue than the future of the planet, but

for the interviewees in this study of community football it is clearly not foremost in their minds.

This suggests that football cannot address environmental concerns beyond the elite level with individual behavioural promotion or self-help schemes. As Sandvoss (2003, p.2) notes, the practices within football are "powerful reflections of historical, social and economic conditions" and these loom large in the organisation of community football. An approach that attempts to understand established practices at the local level could begin to highlight how football could make organisational transformations allowing it to contribute to environmental change.

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