
Understanding sustainability in relation to Football Foundation and Barclays Spaces for Sports facility projects

**A report for the
Football
Foundation**

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1.0 Executive summary

1.1 *Overview*

1.1.2 This project was commissioned by the Football Foundation in April 2011 as a means of trying to understand and clarify notions of sustainability in relation to Football Foundation and Barclays Spaces for Sports facility projects.

1.1.3 The report aims to: provide a functional definition of sustainability for the Football Foundation; establish the intrinsic elements that might influence or inhibit the sustainability of a project; gauge the degree to which interpretations of sustainability within the Football Foundation and facilities are congruent; and establish recommendations regarding how facilities and projects might embed long-term sustainability.

1.2 *Methods*

1.2.1 The research for the project consisted of four interviews with Football Foundation staff and one interview with the Head of Barclays Spaces for Sports. Site visits were undertaken to four facilities, at which interviews were undertaken with relevant personnel.

1.3 *Sustainability: conceptualising, embedding, measuring and understanding it*

1.3.1 The report identifies that there is a broad lack of clarity within sport development about the definitions of, and meanings attached to, sustainability, and that a wide range of factors contribute to its creation and maintenance. This is reflected in the work of the Football Foundation and associated agencies, and consequently the report seeks to provide a more informed and integrated way of conceptualising and implementing sustainability for the organisation.

1.3.2 The report outlines a range of criteria that play important roles in creating and maintaining sustainability in relation to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities: finance; governance and business planning; management, staffing and volunteering; location and accessibility; community “ownership”; community hubs; marketing and publicity; provision of additional activities; and partnerships.

1.3.3 The report demonstrates that a number of barriers can inhibit the creation and maintenance of sustainability in relation to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities. These can be institutional, attitudinal and/or practical barriers. It is also important to recognise that other agendas related to football/sport development can, at times, operate at cross purposes to the aim of creating sustainability.

1.3.4 The report highlights that there are various ways of thinking about sustainability in relation to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities. It can be viewed purely in relation to a single facility. Alternatively, it can be conceptualised in terms of an activity or opportunity. Either way, rather than attempting to establish a single definition that is applicable to each and every facility, it is more important to develop a range of

generic criteria that can be interpreted and applied in a specific manner that is appropriate for the individual site.

- 1.3.5 The report suggests that potential new ways of trying to achieve sustainability in practice at Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities could usefully be considered. These include notions of asset transfer and the clustering of facilities.
- 1.3.6 The report identifies the factors that should be included within any measurement of sustainability in relation to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities. It also suggests both that the expertise and skills needed to identify and monitor issues around sustainability could be embedded within facilities themselves, and that the addition of more qualitative methodologies would be an advantage.
- 1.3.7 The report highlights a number of examples of best practice at Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities, and recommends that there is a mechanism for sharing this among facilities.

2.0 Introduction and rationale

2.1 This project was commissioned by the Football Foundation in April 2011 as a means of trying to understand and clarify notions of sustainability in relation to Football Foundation and Barclays Spaces for Sports facility projects. The report adopts a holistic approach and explores the myriad conceptualisations, interpretations and implementations of sustainability, both within the Football Foundation itself and among the various facility projects that it funds.

2.2 Sustainability is habitually mentioned as an essential criterion in sport development project applications and it is widely espoused as a fundamental characteristic of community sport facilities and spaces. However, evidence suggests that the term lacks precise definition in sporting (and other) contexts, and that it is often viewed simplistically as being synonymous with similar – yet, crucially, different – terms, such as ‘longevity’ and ‘success’. With the absence of a consensus around what sustainability *is*, it is extremely difficult both to establish whether or not a particular project has achieved it, and to provide appropriate advice and direction to facilities in order that they might be able to create and maintain it. Therefore this report seeks to provide an empirically-grounded analysis and knowledge base. It will hopefully be of use to Football Foundation personnel and facility staff in overcoming some of the confusion and contradiction that characterises interpretations of sustainability.

2.3 Overall the research was underpinned by the following aims:

- To provide a functional definition of sustainability for the Football Foundation, which might be used to improve its capacity to measure how sustainable projects are in the future
- To establish, empirically, the intrinsic elements that might influence the sustainability of a project
- To identify, empirically, the key factors that make a project sustainable and the barriers – institutional, practical and attitudinal – that can prevent this coming to fruition
- To gauge the degree to which interpretations of sustainability within the Football Foundation and facilities are congruent, and the extent to which rhetoric is (able to be) matched in practice
- To establish recommendations regarding how facilities and projects might embed long-term sustainability

2.4 The report consists of the following sections:

- An outline of the methods used to undertake the research
- An introduction to the concept of sustainability

- An empirical examination of issues around sustainability – conceptualising, embedding, measuring and understanding it – through interviews with key Football Foundation and Barclays Spaces for Sports personnel
- An empirical examination of how these factors are reflected in Football Foundation and Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities, through interviews with site staff
- Conclusions and recommendations

2.5 Throughout the report, the approach employs a synthesis of the perspectives and opinions articulated by interviewees with an analysis of key Football Foundation documentation around sustainability. This material is augmented by the objective insights provided by the researcher.

3.0 Methods

- 3.1 The research for this report was undertaken between May and June 2011. It consisted of a number of stages, relating to the secondary analysis of documentation and primary data collection.
- 3.2 A review was carried out of the following Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports policy documentation on matters relating to sustainability, especially the role of Activity and Sustainability Advisors (ASAs):
- 'An Introduction to Sustainability'
 - 'Best Practice Learned from Site Visits'
 - 'Report Outlining the Key Findings of Activity and Sustainability Advisor Intervention Period October 2010-March 2011'
 - 'Summary Report Detailing Activity and Sustainability Advisor Intervention, Support Processes and Potential Impact'
 - Project reports (Pilgrim Pitch and Saltmill Park Pavilion, and Wincanton Recreational Trust)
 - 'Barclays Spaces for Sports: Developing People and Places Through Sport'
- 3.3 In-depth, structured interviews were undertaken with the following staff from the Football Foundation:
- Murray Fishlock (Head of Facilities)
 - John Paul Considine (Facilities Programme Manager)
 - Kuljit Randhawa (Activity and Sustainability Advisor)
 - Sarah Mawle (Activity and Sustainability Advisor)
- 3.4 An in-depth, semi-structured interview was undertaken with the following member of staff from Barclays Spaces for Sports:
- Kirk Harrison (Head of Barclays Spaces for Sports)
- 3.5 Site visits were also made to the facilities of four Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports projects. Two of these are facilities that have been identified by the Football Foundation as having successfully delivered on their original development plan and continuing to increase, or maintain, participation levels (Paddington Recreation Ground, London and Sittingbourne Community College). The other two facilities have been identified by the Football Foundation as failing to deliver on their original development plan and failing to increase, or maintain, participation levels (The Crew Club, Brighton and Brighton Rugby Club). During these visits, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with the following individuals:
- Darren Snow MBE, Manager, The Crew Club
 - Richard Barker, Operational Director for Sport and Leisure, Westminster City Council (Paddington Recreation Ground)
 - Geoff Rutt, Projects Manager, Sittingbourne Community College
 - Carole Harris, Community Sports Manager, Sittingbourne Community College
 - Dave Carden, Head of Sport, Sittingbourne Community College
 - David Vincent, Club Representative, Brighton Rugby Club

4.0 Sustainability: a nebulous concept?

- 4.1 Having entered the sport development lexicon during New Labour's tenure in the latter twentieth century, the notion of 'sustainability' is now positioned firmly on sport and recreation agendas. This is particularly the case with sport and recreation facilities and projects that are directed towards harnessing and documenting the benefits for local communities. As academic Iain Lindsey points out, 'sustainability is a key issue in sports development policy and practice in the UK. Terms such as "sustainable" and "sustainability" are used liberally throughout national sports strategies'.¹
- 4.2 However, it is evident that in sport, like in many other institutions and social spheres, the meanings attached to the concept of sustainability are diverse and its employment in a practical setting is characterised by inconsistency. Indeed, 'the variety of language used suggests that sustainability is, in definitional terms, an amorphous concept and, as a result, little policy guidance is commonly provided as to how it should be addressed or achieved in sports development practice'.² This is reflected in the fact that there is little academic research on the relationship between sport and sustainability. Furthermore, the diverse ways in which sustainability is employed in the existing literature does not provide a particularly concise or "workable" definition that could be appropriated and applied in a policy and/or practical environment.
- 4.3 Notwithstanding this, given the work undertaken by the organisation, it is unsurprising that sustainability is a frequently mentioned concept in Football Foundation (and related) documentation. For instance, it is stated that sustainability:

*is a word you probably hear a lot when it comes to planning, managing and delivering projects and services but you may not know how to achieve it or indeed, what it actually means in real terms.*³

In addition, sustainability:

*should be an integral part of any project plan or strategy, along with who is responsible for it.*⁴

A sustainable organisation is subsequently:

*one that is "fit for purpose", including having a robust governance structure which is appropriate for the organisation's activities and area(s) of operation.*⁵

- 4.4 While Football Foundation documentation on the topic consistently emphasises the importance of sustainability, this is done in a rather generic manner. It is apparent that little information is provided in terms of a specific definition and there is a lack of detail around what it includes or looks like in practice. The ambiguity over what sustainability *is* could lead to an absence of agreement within the Football Foundation around its

¹ Lindsey, I. (2008) 'Conceptualising sustainability in sports development', *Leisure Studies*, 27(3), pp. 279-94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³ Football Foundation (no date) 'An introduction to sustainability', London: Football Foundation, p.2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

meaning and application, and a lack of congruence between the Foundation's interpretations and those employed by personnel at Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities.

- 4.5 In this context, while this report aims to provide a practical, jargon-free response to this state of affairs, Lindsey's model of the various forms of sustainability in sport development provides a useful starting point. He proposes four main elements within this typology:
- Individual sustainability
 - Community sustainability
 - Organisational sustainability
 - Institutional sustainability
- 4.6 Individual sustainability refers to 'longer-term changes in individuals' attitudes, aptitudes and/or behaviour through involvement with the sports development programme'.⁶
- 4.7 Community sustainability refers to 'the maintenance of changes in the community in which the sports development programme is delivered'.⁷
- 4.8 Organisational sustainability refers to 'the maintenance or expansion of sports development programmes by the organisation responsible for their delivery'.⁸
- 4.9 Institutional sustainability refers to 'longer-term changes in policy, practice, economic and environmental conditions in the wider context of the sports development programme'.⁹
- 4.10 With regard to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities, organisational and institutional sustainability are probably most pertinent, due to their respective emphases on developing sport *per se*, and the influence on such processes of wider social, economic and political conditions. However, all components of the model are likely to be significant in attempting to create and measure sustainability at particular sites, for the development of individuals and communities themselves is an important corollary effect of sport provision. This can, in turn, impact positively on the operation of the facilities themselves.
- 4.11 Building on Lindsey's model, academics Mona Shediac-Rizkallah and Lee Bone provide another viewpoint. They argue that the factors affecting sustainability can be categorised into three broad groups: project design and implementation factors, factors within the organisation setting, and factors in the broader community environment.¹⁰
- 4.12 Project design and implementation factors 'include the process of negotiation underpinning a programme, the effectiveness of the programme, the length of time

⁶ Lindsey, I. (2008) 'Conceptualising sustainability in sports development', *Leisure Studies*, 27(3), p.282.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 283.

⁹ Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁰ Shediac-Rizkallah, M. & Bone, L. (1998) 'Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programmes: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy', *Health Education Research*, 13(1), pp.87-108.

available for the programme to address sustainability, the available financial capital and the training available to develop human capital'.¹¹

- 4.13 Factors within the organisation setting 'include the strength of organizations delivering the programme, the extent to which programmes are integrated into organisational structures and the presence and capabilities of programme "champions" or leaders'.¹²
- 4.14 Factors in the broader community environment 'include the political, social and economic environment of the programme and the degree of community participation'.¹³
- 4.15 Like Lindsey's interpretation, Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone's model provides a useful way of thinking about sustainability. It emphasises both macro and micro level influences, and highlights the importance of taking the broader conditions underpinning a project into account, alongside the day-to-day factors that affect its operation.
- 4.16 In summary, the above academic contributions demonstrate the plethora of issues that can influence the sustainability of a project. The next chapter of the report examines how these ideal types are played out in practice – through an analysis of the views of Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports staff and management personnel at case study facilities.

¹¹ Shediac-Rizkallah, M. & Bone, L. (1998) 'Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programmes: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy', *Health Education Research*, 13(1), pp.87-108.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

5.0 Sustainability: conceptualising, embedding, measuring and understanding it

5.1 Overview

5.1.2 This chapter represents an amalgam of the responses of Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports staff who were interviewed for the project, along with analysis and further commentary from the researcher.

5.2 Conceptualising sustainability

5.2.1 Given the issues already outlined in this report – namely a lack of clarity about the definitions and meanings of sustainability, and the variety of facets that contribute to its creation and maintenance – it is perhaps unsurprising that Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports staff articulate different, individualised interpretations and conceptualisations of sustainability. These are informed by their particular areas of work and experiential knowledge. Notwithstanding this, there are a number of commonalities in these understandings.

5.2.2 There is a notable consensus that sustainability refers to the continual, long-term ability of a facility to provide high-quality participation activities. There is recognition that this might be a somewhat idealistic interpretation, however. A more pragmatic consideration may be more appropriate, centring on the capacity to keep sites open and functional, in adequate condition and used by a variety of sections of the local community.

5.2.3 It is evident that financial issues are perceived to be at the forefront of any notion of sustainability. Within this, the ability to generate alternative sources of income and capacity build among volunteers appears to be especially significant. Factors relating to site and organisational maintenance, sinking funds and the workforce management structure are also deemed to play fundamental roles.

5.2.4 Football Foundation staff recognise that the multitude of possible interpretations of sustainability are reflected in projects themselves – a view that was corroborated during the interviews at these sites (see section 6.2).

5.2.5 In particular, it is perceived that the individuals involved in actually running facilities see sustainability primarily in terms of financial matters – sometimes at the expense of other factors. This is not necessarily the case, however, with facility personnel demonstrating a comprehensive appreciation of the multifarious factors that underpin sustainability issues in relation to their respective projects (see section 6.2).

5.2.6 While the importance of sustainability is widely recognised by Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports staff – and indeed by all the individuals involved in the case study facilities – it needs to be acknowledged that, for facility personnel, other elements intrinsic to project delivery can sometimes become more pressing (albeit most likely temporarily). In some instances, especially at those facilities run by small clubs, strategies are often short-term and the infrastructure for a long-term vision – in terms of personnel, sinking funds, business plans and policies to ensure efficient and effective succession – is not (able to be put) in place. There may be times when pressing day-to-day objectives, such as paying bills and simply keeping a facility, necessarily take priority.

- 5.2.7 Educating facilities about the importance of embedding long-term sustainability strategies alongside their capacity to respond to everyday concerns, and providing them with the necessary capacity to carry this out, could be an important task for the Football Foundation. This is recognised by Foundation staff, with such a process seen to be particularly pertinent in relation to smaller clubs and community facilities. This is because they are less able to rely on recurrent funding streams, and they are more susceptible to changes in personnel that can result in significant gaps in experiential knowledge and expertise.
- 5.2.8 It might also be valuable to proceed beyond notions of sustainability that conceptualise it as being linked to – indeed, perhaps, *limited* to – a particular facility or project. In other words, it might be advantageous, in some cases, to focus on trying to ensure that the *activity or opportunity* is sustainable, rather than limiting attention to a single organisation. For instance, a project may only last six weeks (e.g. a coaching qualification), but if it provides a pathway or exit route for the activity to be continued and developed elsewhere, then this might be regarded as a *sustainable process*.
- 5.2.9 This has already been recognised by the Football Foundation as an important issue, with it being stated that:

*sustainability does not just apply to the continued delivery of services but also to the continued participation and engagement of beneficiaries. Exit routes and participation pathways provide a means for beneficiaries to progress and develop as a result of their involvement with an organisation or project.*¹⁴

This is not to underplay the importance of embedding sustainability within individual sites, but it does help to broaden and contextualise how it might be interpreted and put into practice.

- 5.2.10 Taking the above points into account, it might be argued that establishing a single, definitive meaning of sustainability is not only a difficult task, but also may not always be practically desirable. The specific components of a facility and the context in which it operates are fundamental to any notion of sustainability, and it may be problematic to attempt to establish a definition that is applicable and workable both for a site with multiple AGPs based at a large secondary educational institution and a small MUGA on an inner-city housing estate. In other words, what *is*, *can* or *should be* sustainable is likely to differ considerably.
- 5.2.11 Nevertheless, the importance of context does not render any shared conceptualisation of sustainability redundant. Indeed, the opposite is the case. The key issue is arguably not about seeking to establish a catch-all, shared interpretation to be used on every Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facility, but to develop a range of generic criteria that can be interpreted and applied *in a specific manner that is appropriate for the individual site*. These could include models of best practice and identified prerequisites about sustainability. The overarching aim of such a conceptual mapping must be to ensure that facilities are aware of the key factors underpinning sustainability and the barriers to achieving it, and are able to embed them strategically in order to achieve a model of sustainability *that is appropriate and functional for them*. Ideally, an understanding of what is sustainable should be established collaboratively by facility

¹⁴ Football Foundation (no date) 'An introduction to sustainability', London: Football Foundation, p. 19.

staff and Foundation personnel. This would not only allow a combination of strategic expertise and local experiential knowledge, but could also be an empowering process for the facilities themselves.

5.3 *Embedding sustainability: creating the appropriate conditions*

5.3.1 Barclays Spaces for Sports' 'Developing People and Places Through Sport' report highlights the following factors in the process of trying to embed and achieve sustainability:¹⁵

- *Identification of national partners that can engage regionally and locally, and might be a source of ongoing funding (such as volunteering, youth inclusion, sports development and health and education agencies)*
- *Consideration of the development of revenue streams for delivery of activities around specific issues (such as evening youth provision), and for ongoing site maintenance and upgrading*
- *Further refinement of plans for a site 'toolkit' that recognises the huge variety of sites but provides generic information on subjects such as funding, involving and consulting communities, development of user groups, volunteering, developing participation, working with the press, business planning and training opportunities (e.g. for working with the most marginalised)*
- *Toolkit development accompanied by strategy to support its use, whether through regional and local meetings, local Barclays branch input and volunteering or online options*
- *Development of online tools that can aid inter-site communication, the sharing of best practice, positive PR and cross-programme promotion*
- *Development of other means of cross-fertilising good practice and a sense of it as a national programme through, for example, regional networking meetings, regional and national inter-site competitions, programmed inter-site learning visits, newsletters, websites and e-mail groups*
- *The creation of links between flagship sites and local sites through an online database, networking meetings, newsletters, etc.*

5.3.2 Notions of sustainability must be considered by organisations and embedded in their projects *right from the very beginning*. This includes the planning and application processes. Following these stages, issues around sustainability need to be revisited, reassessed and, if necessary, re-implemented throughout the lifespan of a project. Furthermore, sustainability should not be viewed as an "add-on", as purely an aspiration or as something that will inevitably occur if a variety of particular factors are operating positively. Rather, it should be integrated fully with all other aspects of a facility's

¹⁵ Barclays Spaces for Sports/Manchester Institute of Sport and Physical Activity (no date) 'Developing People and Places Through Sport', Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, p. 79.

strategy, primarily the business plan and football/sport development plan that drives its overall direction.

- 5.3.3. It is appropriate to view sustainability as a process rather than a state. Furthermore, it is beneficial to understand notions of 'sustainable' and 'unsustainable' as existing along a continuum rather than as polar opposites. In other words, viewing a project as unequivocally sustainable or unsustainable does not lend itself to a particularly sophisticated way of thinking about sustainability, and does little to identify and react to the issues underpinning a given situation. Instead, a model that identifies degrees of sustainability can not only reduce the possibility of complacency (i.e. a view that the facility is operating perfectly well and so can be left to run itself) or a fatalistic approach (i.e. the facility is doomed to fail), but it can also lead to the development of more workable, incremental approaches to creating sustainability.
- 5.3.4 A number of factors are important in the creation and maintenance of sustainability. These have been identified by the Football Foundation in a variety of existing documentation and are central to the work of ASAs in evaluating projects. These include: finance; governance and business planning; management, staffing and volunteering; location and accessibility; community "ownership"; community hubs; marketing and publicity; provision of additional activities; and partnerships. Although they are discussed below as separate points, there are significant degrees of overlap and it is beneficial to see them as mutually reinforcing, rather than isolated, tenets in achieving sustainability.
- 5.3.5 *Finance* – Financial matters, primarily the generation of revenue, are unsurprisingly fundamental to creating sustainability. They should be embedded within all aspects of the business plan (see para. 5.3.6). Put simply, a facility is unlikely to remain operational if it cannot function financially. From the experiences of Football Foundation staff, it appears to be the case that facility personnel can often over-assume how much revenue they will bring in – a sum which is rarely matched in practice. Consequently, it is clear that three finance-related issues are especially crucial in creating sustainability: a realistic interpretation of the basic costs involved in running a facility; an appreciation of funding opportunities, and the designation of responsibility for identifying and applying to them; and the generation of income from multiple sources, rather than a reliance on a single income model. Adequate responses to these points may not emanate if finance is expected to come indefinitely from Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports and alternative funding models are not developed.
- 5.3.6 *Governance and business planning* – As in all aspects of sport provision and development, and business in general, good governance is fundamental to creating sustainability in Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities. Key to this state of affairs is the creation of a strategic business plan and a football or sport development plan. Issues related to sustainability must be embedded firmly within a robust business plan. In turn, this plan should drive all other aspects of the project. Central to the effectiveness of any plan is matching what is detailed in its content with the appropriate infrastructure and workforce to implement it.
- 5.3.7 *Management, staffing and volunteering* – It is self-evident that having the appropriate staff, and management and operational systems, in place is fundamental to the sustainable running of a facility. It is apparent that the issue is particularly important with regard to volunteering, as volunteers make up such a large percentage of staff at

Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports sites. It is well-known that attracting volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult, especially among young people, although sport tends to recruit better than other spheres. However, evidence suggests that this figure may be restricted by the increasingly onerous time constraints of modern society and current legislation, e.g. over child protection issues, the need to undergo CRB checks, etc. In order to maintain sustainability, it is productive to have a programme in place to support and mentor volunteers, and for a succession plan (passing on best practice, knowledge and expertise) to be in place in the event of key staff or “project champions” leaving the project.

- 5.3.8 *Location and accessibility* – The location of a facility can have a significant influence on its sustainability. In terms of overall usage, it is unsurprising that a facility in an area of low population density and/or with poor geographical access may struggle to become a sustainable resource. This is because it is unlikely to attract the number of clubs and variety in usage that are identified in this report as being fundamental principles of sustainability (see section 5.6). Issues around access are more than simply a case of location, however, and a tendency to focus purely on notions of *spatial* accessibility can be misleading and preclude acknowledgment of other important factors, such as social and behavioural patterns. For example, some sites may be easy to get to but can be perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming. Crucially, this might not be the result of any tangible, identifiable danger, but due to *feelings* of a lack of safety. A facility in an area that has a negative reputation in the local popular imagination (e.g. associations with anti-social behaviour) might also struggle to be sustainable. Facility users can also be very territorial in some circumstances and only use sites that are in the immediate vicinity of where they live. This can preclude the participation of other groups as well (see para. 5.3.9). This is likely to be even more pronounced in inner-city areas.
- 5.3.9 *Community “ownership”* – A sense of community “ownership” – whether that be literal or figurative – can be key to achieving sustainability, especially in inner-city areas. It can increase volunteering and enthusiasm among participants, and also reduce the likelihood of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. To this end, local communities need to be consulted (where appropriate) and engaged from the application stage in any project. A wide range of interest groups should be included and the formation of a steering group possesses clear benefits. Despite the importance of this issue, there are tangible problems that can be associated with notions of “ownership” – the facility might be seen to be “owned” by, and associated predominantly with, a *particular segment* of the community. This might preclude usage by others. For example, it might be seen as excluding members of minority ethnic groups or older people, and viewed by them as “not for us”.
- 5.3.10 *Community hubs* – It is highly likely that those facilities that offer provision beyond football (and often sport in general) will be the most sustainable. In particular, with football provision being so saturated and contributing to competitive local markets, having other activities can improve or maximise usage. This makes sites more flexible which, in turn, can contribute to increased revenue – crucially, from a variety of sources. While most usage will be generated through football and other sports, the inclusion of a meeting room or classroom at a site can facilitate the provision of a range of other activities, from knitting to weight-loss classes. These activities can increase usage and revenue. Significant additional income can also be generated by the presence of a licensed bar (although there are hazards from the type of registrations that this might bring). Fundamentally, any space which can generate some form of income – even just a

kitchen selling refreshments at weekends – is likely to help create and maintain sustainability. Such multi-purpose sites effectively represent community hubs, which not only are more likely to become sustainable but also enable links to other areas such as education and public health. The role of sites as community hubs underpins the broader sense of community “ownership” outlined above (para. 5.3.9), especially for those who feel marginalised or excluded by sport. Importantly, these additional spaces within a facility can help to attract additional funding. For instance, some funders will not allocate monies to football *per se*, but they will fund corollary spaces.

- 5.3.11 *Marketing, communication and publicity* – While marketing and publicity are seen as having a part to play in creating sustainability, they appear to be treated relatively less importantly by Football Foundation staff. This is because there is a sense that after initial communication, information about individual facilities is passed on by user groups and, as such, they effectively “market themselves”. This does not, however, preclude the need to undertake rigorous market research into the needs, desires and participation patterns of the community in which a site is based. This should underpin any bespoke strategic sustainability plan. In addition, it is evident that members of communities are not always aware of the availability of “non-football” spaces at a site. Given their centrality to creating sustainability (see para. 5.3.10), communicating the presence of these spaces is an important task.
- 5.3.12 *Provision of additional activities* – The provision of additional sport-related activities (e.g. coaching qualifications, referee training, First Aid training, play schemes, holiday camps, etc.) is an important aspect in creating sustainability in projects. The inclusion of coach education programmes within the construction of new AGPs represents an important tenet. They can be income-generating, and they can also increase community buy-in and facilitate important links and partnerships with organisations such as local authorities and County Football Associations (see para. 5.3.13). It is important to note, however, that there is a fine line between the provision of specialist/core activities and offering additional ones. Facilities that get this balance wrong may be hampering their ability to be sustainable.
- 5.3.13 *Partnerships* – The creation of positive, functioning partnerships and community networks are absolutely critical to creating and maintaining sustainability. Ideally a steering group will be created which will have overall direction and management of a facility. In a holistic sense, partnerships enable the individual project to be embedded firmly within the local – and even regional and national (where appropriate) – context, and help to clarify its aims and objectives. More specifically, local partnerships – which may comprise of (among others) local clubs and leagues, local authorities and councils, businesses, educational institutions, health agencies and third sector bodies – provide a number of benefits regarding sustainability. First, they can maximise expertise and resources in revenue generation, marketing and business planning, and also ensure that people are aware of the different available opportunities and requisite legislation. Second, partnerships can help to facilitate community ownership and buy-in (see para. 5.3.9). Third, they can facilitate the sharing of best practice, and ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication of resources and staffing. It is evident though that some partnerships function better than others and they vary in their impact. Some are very proactive. For example, linking schools and local authorities with particular facilities can enable the ring-fencing of certain budgets and provide a large number of facility users. Others can simply be “box ticking” exercises. A clear articulation of the respective partners’ remits, targets and agendas is vital to establishing a positive arrangement. This

is by no means a straightforward task, as getting partners to commit to involvement in projects in a financial sense may become more difficult in the current economic climate.

- 5.3.14 Taking the above criteria into account, it is clear that in order to give themselves the best chance of maintaining a sustainable facility, projects must ascertain exactly what is needed and required from the group(s) they are working with. There must also be an awareness that these needs and demands will shift over time. Continual re-engagement and consultation is thus required.

5.4 *Embedding sustainability: barriers to its implementation*

- 5.4.1 A number of barriers can be identified that might affect a facility's capacity to be sustainable. These can be institutional, attitudinal and/or practical barriers. Many of these barriers are simply the converse – i.e. the ineffective operation – of the factors identified in section 5.3. These may be compounded by a range of other issues. Those factors that are discussed here are designed to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive, of the potential impediments.
- 5.4.2 With the importance attached to financial matters, primarily the generation of revenue (see para. 5.3.5), it is unsurprising that the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the subsequent cuts to public services are perceived to impact negatively on facilities' capacity to be sustainable. These issues can affect sites on a macro scale, with the absence of secured long-term funding making it difficult to plan, and local authority/council restructures meaning that many posts are short-term with little continuity between them. These issues can also affect sites on a micro scale in relation to, for instance, the capacity to undertake basic maintenance and keep the facility clean.
- 5.4.3 In such a climate, the role of staff, especially volunteers, becomes even more significant. Problems can arise in terms of sustainability if projects are too dependent on a particular member of staff who holds a monopoly on the necessary knowledge and skill sets. If they leave, the project is vulnerable and could cease to be functional. For instance, a volunteer who cuts the grass once a week for free may be taken for granted until s/he leaves the project. As such, a continual process of volunteer recruitment and up-skilling is required – ideally formalised by way of a succession plan and a strategic approach to managing change – to ensure the passing on of knowledge and skills. This is likely to contribute towards the creation of a more sustainable workforce. This is not without its own obstacles, however, as volunteers can be set in their ways and quite parochial about their involvement. This mindset might inhibit the implementation of new ideas and practices, with an "if it isn't broke, why mend it?" viewpoint generating resistance to change.
- 5.4.4. Financial constraints and pressures can lead to an inclination to chase diverse funding streams. While the attainment of diverse funding sources is a crucial facet in creating and maintaining sustainability, without a strong strategic business and/or development plan, this can potentially lead to rapidly fluctuating aims and objectives without appropriate control and direction. This can have negative repercussions for the stability of staff and users, in turn inhibiting the overall sustainability of a project.
- 5.4.5 Striking an appropriate balance between encouraging people involved in projects to be ambitious, but also realistic, is important. For example, it is evident that small community

clubs who use a single grass pitch and a couple of portakabins as changing rooms often, understandably, aspire to build new, larger facilities. Yet there can be a lack of appreciation that such facilities simply cannot be managed and operated in the same way. Fundamentally, it is perceived by Football Foundation staff that small voluntary organisations do not always realise that a bigger partnership (e.g. with a County Football Association and schools) is needed if they are to develop larger facilities. Without such recognition, a significant shift in the provision being offered by a facility can have a drastic effect on its capacity to be sustainable.

- 5.4.6 While not necessarily a barrier *per se*, the *type* of facility can influence a project's ability to be sustainable. For instance, grass pitches run by local authorities need restrictions over their usage if they are to remain in a functional state (e.g. measures to prevent overuse and being temporarily withdrawn from use if they are waterlogged). Consequently, if considered in isolation, grass pitches consistently run at a financial loss. On the other hand, a facility with a state-of-the-art AGP, multiple changing rooms and additional spaces is likely to have greater long-term sustainability. Furthermore, as identified above (para. 5.4.5), the sustainability of the larger site depends on the type of organisations operating it. While it could be taken on and run by a school relatively easily, this could not be done by an individual club.
- 5.4.7 Some facilities possess the capacity to look after themselves to a much greater extent than others, in terms of their material components. For example, a grass pitch with a modest club house can be very robust. With a small amount of maintenance it can still be operational after 60-80 years' use. Alternatively, an AGP will have a much shorter life span. They are likely to need replacing at a substantial cost every 10-15 years, meaning that a larger sinking fund is needed for this type of facility if it is to remain sustainable.
- 5.4.8 The user groups participating at a facility may also have a significant impact on its sustainability. For instance, an AGP being used by school pupils may have much greater usage than one linked to a single club. However, it is also much more susceptible to damage (e.g. if drink cans are left around the area, people playing in incorrect footwear, etc.).
- 5.4.9 As highlighted earlier (paras. 5.3.10 and 5.3.12), the range of spaces offered by a facility can have an impact on sustainability, with a diverse portfolio of sport, leisure and educational environments being crucial. Related to this is the importance of having a variety of groups which use the site. Reliance on a single user group can be a problem, not only in terms of generating revenue, but also in terms of the potential for wider community buy-in and "ownership" (see para. 5.3.9).

5.5 *Measuring sustainability*

- 5.5.1 It is evident that various ways of gauging a site's sustainability are currently employed in practice. Many of these relate to financial factors (see para. 5.3.5) and a belief that if a facility is open, operational and providing benefits for users (however they may be defined), it is sustainable. This is not necessarily the case for, as this report has highlighted, sustainability is usually a much more complicated, nuanced and contingent issue. As such, a reliance on simplistic measures will only provide a partial picture of a site's sustainability. One perception raised among staff was that sustainability can only really be measured in hindsight and the end of the activity/funding will show whether it is

sustainable. While this may be the case, it is not a particularly effective and efficient way of working. It does little to help projects that were relatively unsustainable and may overlook some basic interventions that could have been implemented which could have contributed to the realisation of very different outcomes.

- 5.5.2 All of the factors identified in section 5.3 should be included in any measurement of sustainability. Notwithstanding this, as highlighted earlier in this report (see para. 5.2.11), in order to measure sustainability, it is crucial to establish and understand *what it means for a particular organisation*. The relative significance of the factors discussed in section 5.3 may vary depending on the context and so a detailed understanding of the broader environment – social, cultural, political and geographical – must be in place before any measurement can be attempted.
- 5.5.3 Despite the uncertainty and difficulties around measuring sustainability, certain recurrent factors certainly play a part. For instance, financial capacity – while by no means the only issue – does give a strong indication of a site’s sustainability. If a sinking fund is not being put away, then many important duties and procedures simply cannot be done. In addition, from primarily a sport development perspective, it can be relatively easy to identify whether facilities can sustain predicted levels of participation. If claims are made for the number of teams to increase over a period of time and it is obvious after the first year that it is not happening, then interventions can take place as necessary.
- 5.5.4 Current monitoring and evaluation by the Football Foundation is comprehensive, rigorous and robust. ASAs, in particular, clearly play a significant role in contributing to the potential for, and documenting evidence of, sustainability at facilities. It is apparent, however, that staff feel that monitoring and evaluation information might be used more effectively to identify certain trends around usage which could be fed into strategic plans around sustainability.
- 5.5.5 Embedding the expertise and skills to identify and monitor issues around sustainability *within facilities themselves* would be a productive development. With the Football Foundation’s monitoring and evaluation team being based in London, the point was raised in interviews that unless a significant problem becomes apparent, a project in the north of England, for example, could go 12 months (since its last annual form was submitted) without identifying and responding to minor issues that could inhibit sustainability. This suggests not only that more frequent evaluation on sustainability would be a benefit, but also that it would be very helpful for individual projects to monitor and evaluate sustainability themselves (in conjunction with Football Foundation assessment), so that they can react as appropriate. In particular, an identification of “early warning signs” – based on shared best practice – would help facilities to do this.
- 5.5.6 Existing monitoring and evaluation protocol is extremely useful in measuring usage, and participation rates, especially within marginalised communities. A long-term sustainable site will most likely tick those boxes. However, these factors are not synonymous with sustainability (see section 5.6) and so specific issues around sustainability need to be embedded within any monitoring and evaluation procedure.
- 5.5.7 Ensuring that projects are well familiarised with the different agendas of the institutions they work with is a critical factor. For example, while the Football Association focuses on growth and retention of participants as a key priority, the Football Foundation has a

greater concern with sustaining activities. The two are not the same and an exclusive focus on the former might affect the capacity to do the latter (see section 5.6)

- 5.5.8 In measuring sustainability, it is paramount to know the optimal level of delivery for the particular facility and project. Only by doing this can appropriate measurement take place and suitable factors be put in place to maintain desired levels of performance. In this regard, it is vital to be able to recognise not only when a facility might be operating under its capacity, but also when it might be at its limits in relation to existing provision. In other words, increasing the activity may seem like a way of increasing sustainability, but the facility may actually be working at full capacity and the addition of extra elements might have a negative effect.
- 5.5.9 It is apparent that monitoring and evaluation with regard to sustainability (and other areas) tends to adopt quantitative methodologies. This is unsurprising given that it is arguably easier to collect and quantify statistical data, and broad trends and outputs can subsequently be identified. It is also indicative of wider methods of monitoring sports participation, particularly New Labour's emphasis on numerical targets in raising participation.¹⁶ Football Foundation staff are very open to the inclusion of more qualitative measures and a focus on *outcomes* as well as outputs. Particular case studies demonstrating impacts on individuals and groups would support the process of sharing best practice identified in this report (see paras. 5.2.11, 5.3.13 and 5.7.12).
- 5.5.10 It is believed by Football Foundation staff that more could be done in terms of measuring the participation of volunteers, and checking and evaluating the support mechanisms that are in place to assist their work.

5.6 *Sustainability and success*

- 5.6.1 While sustainability and success are closely linked, they are not synonymous. A nuanced appreciation of their relationship is subsequently required. Of course, this depends on how both terms are defined. As this report has pointed out, both are rather amorphous concepts, but the key issue is *defining them and interpreting them in the particular context of the facilities that they are referring to*.
- 5.6.2 Ideally all sites would be both sustainable and successful. However, in practice this is an extremely difficult task, especially given the fact that the factors that contribute to one outcome might counteract the ability to achieve the other. As such, striking an appropriate balance between the two is paramount.
- 5.6.3 If sustainability is used, broadly, to refer to long-term operation and revenue generation, and success to mean meeting targets around participation, a facility might be sustainable but less successful.
- 5.6.4 For instance, an AGP can accommodate large numbers of participants through its ability to be open for 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is particularly the case when it is

¹⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2000) *A Sporting Future for All* London: DCMS; Department for Culture, Media and Sport/Strategy Unit (2002) *Game Plan: a Strategy for Delivering Government's Sport and Physical Activity Objectives* London: Cabinet Office.

made available for commercial, small-sided match use by organisations such as Goalz, Pitch Invasion and Power League. Income generation is high in such circumstances (due to match fees, league subscriptions and sponsorships), participation levels are substantial, the facility is likely to be well-maintained and a considerable sinking fund would probably be in place. These factors would most likely contribute to a sustainable operation. However, prohibitive pricing and the fact that such competitions tend to be dominated by adult males would mean that the facility would struggle in terms of meeting FA targets, for example, around getting new groups involved, especially from marginalised communities. The quality of provision would also likely be restricted. Therefore, the extent to which such a facility would be successful is a moot point.

- 5.6.5 Alternatively, a site may be successful by the above measures, but lacking in sustainability.
- 5.6.6 For example, the AGP might be used at capacity by a number of junior clubs. It would thus be extremely successful in terms of meeting wider targets about participation and sports development. However, the involvement of the junior clubs will probably provide considerably less income than could be accrued from adult participants in commercial provision, with discounted rates in place and perhaps fees even being waived for members of low socio-economic groups and/or marginalised communities. It is evident that such facilities also often become dormant from Easter as junior clubs switch training sessions to park pitches in order to save money. As a consequence, without a significant source of income over the summer, the facility might struggle to be sustainable.
- 5.6.7 In this context, it is unsurprising that the construction of new AGPs results in significant interest from commercial league providers (e.g. Goalz, Pitch Invasion and Power League), who are keen to use them for their competitions. While this represents an important source of revenue, for the reasons outlined earlier in this report around community ownership (see para. 5.3.9), it is crucial to strike a happy medium between commercial and community provision at any facility.
- 5.6.8 Fundamentally, in an ideal world, a sustainable project will eventually (if not already) become successful and *vice versa*. Yet for this to become a reality – and for both ideals to be met – a specific mix of facilities and user groups must be in place, alternative sources of income must be achievable and a long-term vision and strategy must be embedded in the business and/or football/sport development plan.

5.7 *Understanding sustainability*

- 5.7.1 Although not necessarily a source of conflict, it is important to recognise that attempts to create sustainability may involve the pursuit of certain agendas that do not necessarily synchronise with other issues that football facilities are expected to engage with. For instance, the FA emphasises increasing participation and recruiting new participants to a greater degree than sustainability *per se*. Consequently, the pressing and important issue of increasing participation by female players is one that many facilities might try to engage with. However, if the demand does not exist at a particular site or females are playing elsewhere, basing a strategy around such participation is likely to be unsustainable. In addition, despite the fact that engaging users from marginalised groups is an important aim, and while it might increase participation and have many corollary effects for the users, it is arguably difficult to maintain from a business perspective. In

such circumstances, facilities may stop trying to develop under-represented groups and allocate the site to the most reliable, profitable and/or easy-to-manage users. This is something that should be monitored by the Football Foundation.

- 5.7.2 To reiterate, it is apparent that a balance between diversity and core activities is required. From a sustainability perspective, it is important to have a regular client group which generates revenue. Yet it is also the case that diverse usage provides an important contribution to sustainability, especially around issues of community ownership (see para. 5.3.9).
- 5.7.3 In formulating any strategy, it is paramount that facilities “know their communities” and are aware of their needs and desires. Furthermore, there needs to be recognition that these are likely to change over time. It is also important to ascertain what is required by project partners, namely whether there is an emphasis on raising participation or the provision of long-term facilities.
- 5.7.4. There is clearly support among Football Foundation staff for the idea of asset transfer. In principle it is viewed as a highly workable phenomenon. There is recognition that it is an increasing trend and, particularly in the current economic climate which has led to the restructuring of local authorities, there is certainly openness to exploring its possibilities in practice.
- 5.7.5 One caveat to this development is that staff believe it is crucial first to identify *why* local authorities may be seeking to offload facilities. It is perceived primarily to be a way of cutting existing losses, rather than generating new income.
- 5.7.6. The process of asset transfer is deemed to hold a number of positives. It might be the case that by transferring an asset a local authority is giving the lease to a more engaged and knowledgeable organisation. It can also overcome bureaucratic “red tape”, while smaller community organisations might be more successful in terms of accessing certain forms of funding and partnerships. Fundamentally, a project can gain access to a quality and size of facility that they would probably be unlikely to fund themselves. For a well-managed club with a realistic business strategy and appropriate sinking fund, a transfer could be relatively straightforward, and lead to a more effective and efficient operation of the facility.
- 5.7.7 However, it is evident that problems could arise if the idea is not fully thought through and the extent of potential repercussions is not acknowledged. For instance, it is crucial to look beyond the idea of an original “pot of gold” and appreciate the longer-term issues which come with a facility, especially financial ones. In addition, clubs need to be aware that in cases where the local council has always undertaken the management of a facility, a significant gap will appear on their withdrawal. The recruitment of volunteers then becomes vital, while obtaining the requisite maintenance machinery is also important. In sum, asset transfer might be appropriate for some facilities, but not others. Again, this depends on the particular conditions of the facility and its capacity to undertake new provision, and must be based on a rigorous analysis of the needs and usage patterns of the communities that it serves.
- 5.7.8 Fundamentally, any organisations undertaking asset transfer need to be very well-advised and be extremely clear about what is involved. There also needs to be a comprehensive assessment around finance and capacity, and certain prerequisites

should be in place before facilities change hands. The Football Foundation could usefully provide support and mentoring for this process.

- 5.7.9 It may be beneficial to view the idea of sustainability in terms of areas or clusters (at a municipal and/or regional level) rather than in relation to single facilities. There appears to be support for this idea among Football Foundation staff, especially if it can lead to a broadening of horizons, the creation of partnerships and the sharing of different skills and expertise by facilities.
- 5.7.10 Adopting a macro perspective and viewing sustainability in such a way can provide a more accurate and informative assessment of which facilities are functioning well. For instance, one site might see an increase in registrations of “new” teams. This might appear to signify sustainability, but it might also be an instance of displacement, in that teams have actually moved from another nearby site, decreasing the functionality of that one in the process.
- 5.7.11 It is evident that facilities themselves could make efficiency savings, namely in terms of teaming up with a number of other clubs and approaching a business or service for a package deal. In addition, if there are a number of facilities near each other which are offering similar provision, it would be a good idea for them to work together from a maintenance perspective. For example, clubs within the same vicinity could pool resources, with perhaps one owning a spiker and another having a tractor. There might also be opportunities for volunteers to undertake work for the benefit of more than one club or facility.
- 5.7.12 Key to such an approach is sharing best practice. Being able to identify why site x works and site y does not, despite the fact that they might be based in the same area and trying to engage similar groups, is a crucial tenet in achieving sustainability, especially if the strengths of the more successful site(s) can be implemented at the others. Thus, a mentality of knowledge transfer and capacity building is crucial to achieving sustainability, and it can be boosted by adopting a macro scale approach. As such, the creation of local/regional steering groups, rather than those simply based at individual facilities, appears to be an effective process.
- 5.7.13 For the idea of sustainable clusters to work there needs to be a rigorous mapping of what is already in existence. Football Foundation staff perceive that there is certainly room for improvement in this regard, for it appears that there is little evidence base around what individual clubs possess in terms of equipment, skills and machinery. A perception was forwarded that there is a lack of knowledge of this within CFAs, although attempts are being made to remedy this through the County Administration System.
- 5.7.14 The notion of sustainable clusters does not simply apply to existing sites. Their operationalisation could have a significant influence on the location of new ones as well.

6.0 Sustainability: views from the facilities

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 The aim of this report is not to try to “diagnose” sustainable/unsustainable sites or to replicate the excellent monitoring and evaluation work currently undertaken by ASAs. Rather, it is about identifying conducive factors for, and barriers to, creating sustainability. Consequently, this section does not address the selected facilities on a case by case basis, but provides a thematic coverage of the ways in which the issues raised in chapter 5.0 are enacted in practice.

6.2 Conceptualising sustainability

6.2.1 Staff at the facility sites clearly understand that sustainability needs to be considered in a broader context than simply that of a single activity and that it needs to take into account bigger issues and wider processes. A thoughtful and nuanced appreciation of sustainability appears to be in place, and there were some interesting opinions raised around its implementation in practice.

6.2.2 This report has identified that there are a multitude of interpretations of sustainability (see section 5.2) and it is evident that individuals’ ideas are influenced by the type of role that they undertake at a facility. For instance, while the community sport manager at one facility saw sustainability entirely in terms of maximising usage – keeping it fully-booked all year round, both with existing customers and new recruits – the projects manager prioritised keeping the facility revenue-neutral (at the very least).

6.2.3 An interesting idea that was raised was the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sustainability. The former was seen to refer to financial issues, i.e. improving levels of facilities, maintenance and future capital provision for replacing the built infrastructure. The latter was seen to refer to the actual use of the facility, such as ensuring that diverse groups (e.g. school pupils, community clubs, recreational users) are appropriately engaged with the site. While the problems of dichotomising the two forms of sustainability are acknowledged, this is a useful distinction and reflects the multitude of factors outlined in this report.

6.2.4 Another key point that was raised was the importance of facilities recognising that, if they are to be sustainable, they cannot necessarily “own” all aspects of the provision. For instance, at a site that provides a wide range of activities there may be the need to bring in another organisation to undertake certain aspects of the provision. It should be noted, however, that while both organisations would ostensibly be pulling in the same direction, this policy could lead to competition between them, especially if they are targeting similar user groups.

6.2.5 It is also apparent that a significant, and potentially problematic, dialectic is in place regarding sustainability and the need to continually provide “new” activities. The opinion was raised at one site that, for the purposes of achieving funding, it is often necessary to demonstrate the provision of “new” activities, and/or evidence that “new” participants are becoming involved and engaged. However, an emphasis is also placed on sustainability. A potential problem lies in the fact that, by its very nature, it is difficult to demonstrate that something which is “new” is also sustainable. Conversely, in order to maintain

sustainability, the inclusion of “new” activities might be perceived as representing a threat and so would need to be managed very carefully.

6.3 *Embedding sustainability*

6.3.1 The factors discussed in this section are those that were highlighted, in the first instance, by Football Foundation staff as being important prerequisites for creating and maintaining sustainability. It is clear that some facilities have greater capacity to embed some of the key sustainability criteria than others.

6.3.2 *Finance* – The importance of revenue generation is likewise highlighted by facility staff. It is perceived that various forms of funding are required, although some core funding is necessary so that projects can rely on ring-fenced annual income. It is also apparent that there can be some tangible difficulties in planning long-term when funding is often short-term. This can lead to chasing funds without a sense of direction and purpose (see para. 5.4.4). For smaller clubs, such as Brighton Rugby Club, finance is precarious and, inevitably, day-to-day concerns can require most attention at times. The perception was raised at one facility that finance remains a substantial impediment to maintaining current levels of sustainability through an expansion of the site’s provision. It was perceived that a “vicious circle” exists, with the Football Foundation (and Sport England) stating that they should not be the primary source of funding and other funders saying that they will not allocate funds unless the Football Foundation or Sport England have already committed monies. This was seen to be somewhat of a contradiction: improving facilities strategically to meet demand would represent increasing sustainability at this facility, but staff feel that they are being prevented from doing it.

6.3.3 *Governance and business planning* – Despite the vast differences between the types of project undertaken (from large municipal recreation ground to local community youth centre), all of the case study facilities recognised the importance of embedding their work within a strategic plan of action. For example, the sport development operation of Paddington Recreation Ground draws directly from the Active Westminster Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.¹⁷ The Crew Club also highlighted the importance of strategic thinking, readying themselves for change a year before it is likely to happen, in order to enable a contingency plan of action.

6.3.4 *Management, staffing and volunteering* – The importance of volunteers mentioned by Football Foundation personnel (see para. 5.3.7) is reflected by facility staff. This is not just to do with the skills, expertise and capacity they bring to a project, but also relates to the ways in which they can help to embed the facility within the community. Furthermore, the changing financial climate and the closure of certain grant programmes mean that volunteers are increasingly vital to facilities’ operation and, as such, they need to become more “professional” and self-sufficient. The perception was raised, however, that the role of volunteers can differ between organisations and facilities. For example, one individual stated that the belief that sustainability is about generating a pool of volunteers (and removing the need for development workers) can ignore the fact that money still has to be spent on volunteer co-ordinators. In practice, volunteers are not without their problems and this can have detrimental effects on sustainability. For

¹⁷ City of Westminster Council (no date) ‘Active Westminster: Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, 2008-2013’, Westminster City Council.

instance, one individual suggested that at some facilities (especially in deprived areas) volunteers might put themselves forwards to contribute, but they have certain needs themselves. As a result, support mechanisms need to be offered to them before they can support the organisation. Furthermore, existing dynamics and tensions within a community can be reproduced within volunteer groups. At the other end of the spectrum, when frequent turnover of staff and volunteers is an issue, developing a sense of loyalty within the club can help to engage people in the long-term and encourage new people to step into the breach when required (e.g. Brighton Rugby Club). It does not appear that an audit of volunteer participation is in operation at any of the sites. This might be a useful task for facilities to undertake in order to identify any succession-related issues that might arise should key volunteers leave their posts (see paras. 5.3.7 and 5.4.3).

- 6.3.5 *Location and accessibility* – The location of a facility can be an important issue. For example, a facility like the Crew Club, which is based in an area with a negative reputation (the Whitehawk Estate in Brighton), can experience problems in terms of usage. It tends to attract most of its users from the immediate environs, with people from outside the area visiting infrequently. On the other hand, facilities in such locations can sometimes be at an advantage in terms of gaining funding grants to support their work. Some facilities are in the enviable position both of being accessible and situated in a geographical area where there is very little competition in terms of the facilities they offer (Sittingbourne Community College). This means that the facility has a constant stream of participants wishing to use it. In most cases, locations carry positive and negative elements – for example, the position of Brighton Rugby Club on the edge of the city means that public transport can be a problem, but car-parking is in plentiful supply.
- 6.3.6 *Community “ownership”* – A community steering group, such as that in practice at Paddington Recreation Ground, can help to ensure that the diversity of park users and their interests are represented in all aspects of provision. It can act as a conduit for collecting community feedback as well. There was a consensus that engaging all members of the local community should be a central tenet of sustainability.
- 6.3.7 *Community hubs* – The ability to embed multiple forms of activity and space within a facility clearly provides a positive contribution towards sustainability. Examples of functional corollary spaces that generate usage by various aspects of the local community are a kitchen for cookery classes, a music studio and a games room (The Crew Club) and an environmental area, indoor and outdoor gyms, classrooms and a cafe (Paddington Recreation Ground). Encouraging participants to use such spaces is not always straightforward, however, as they are often inclined to leave a facility straight after playing (e.g. at Brighton Rugby Club). In such instances, clubs have to decide whether it is financially worthwhile to pay an employee to keep a bar open.
- 6.3.8 *Marketing, communication and publicity* – Marketing, communication and publicity can be crucial in terms of accessing hard to reach groups who are not aware of/participating in the activities offered by a facility. Although it seems like a relatively simple issue, it is apparent that projects cannot always afford to market their facilities and generate press releases. In some cases, publicity is a luxury. As a result, being able to harness free or low-cost communication is important, and often means relying on in-house capacity. Some facilities are in the fortunate position of attracting such a large base of participants – who, in turn pass on details word-of-mouth – that little action is needed in terms of marketing and communication (Sittingbourne Community College). Others need to try

continually to raise their profile through holding various community events (Brighton Rugby Club).

- 6.3.9 *Provision of additional activities* – The significance attached to the capacity to provide additional activities, such as coaching courses, identified by Football Foundation staff (para. 5.3.12) is reflected in practice. Site personnel identify this as an important source of revenue and as a means of raising the profile of the facility.
- 6.3.10 *Partnerships* – When they function positively, partnerships can be symbiotic. For example, a partnership between a school-based facility and a local club can offer benefits for both partners: the school is able to offer the facilities and a constant stream of young sporting talent to the club, while the club is able to provide coaches and exit pathways which contribute to the sustainability of the overall activity (see paras. 5.2.8 and 5.2.9). This is a model that Sittingbourne Community College are hoping to implement. Although partnerships can provide a range of other distinct benefits (see para. 5.3.13), such relationships are not without problems. When partners are working at a distance, the partnership might function effectively and efficiently. Yet bringing partners together to work on a day-to-day basis can result in tensions and small factors destabilising the broader pursuit of sustainability. As a consequence, partnerships need to be managed carefully.
- 6.3.10 *Measurement of users* – Management booking systems can provide a relatively straightforward, clear and robust way of measuring usage at facilities (where applicable). A useful addition is in place at Paddington Recreation Ground. Discreet wooden posts with infrared beams within them are placed at all of the park's entrances and exits in order to calculate park users who are not engaged in the more "formal", organised activities that the park offers. Again, this reflects the predominantly quantitative approach to monitoring and evaluation outlined earlier in this report (see para. 5.5.9).
- 6.3.11 The idea of viewing sustainability through the clustering of facilities (see paras.5.7.9-5.7.14) has received support within the facilities. The possibility of exploring partnerships and economies of scale, sharing expertise and equipment, and seeking to achieve package deals from companies are seen as elements that would benefit sustainability at sites. In this regard, advice and assistance from the Football Foundation about how this can be implemented would be welcomed.

6.4 *Best practice: some examples of effective sustainability*

- 6.4.1 While not technically an example of asset transfer *per se*, sharing responsibility for a facility's assets appears to be an effective procedure. For example, the grass football pitches and MUGA at The Crew Club are owned by the facility itself, but they are maintained by Brighton and Hove City Council. This means both that the facility is not required to allocate funds to undertake maintenance and that a sense of community ownership is engendered as the facilities are not labelled with council logos.
- 6.4.2 Another effective variation on this theme occurs at the Paddington Recreation Ground. Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) have an income-generating contract with Westminster City Council (WCC), whereby GLL pay the council to be able to run the facilities. GLL are responsible for collecting income, designing and running programmes, maintaining facilities, etc.).The contract incentivises GLL to generate income and run the site

efficiently. If the profit margin exceeds target figures, some of the funds go back to WCC to be used for community sport interventions.

- 6.4.3 Striking a balance between success and sustainability is crucial (see section 5.6). It is apparent that the most sustainable sites are those that are able to balance the use of commercial and community provision. For instance, this is part of the contract that Westminster City Council has with Greenwich Leisure Limited (see para. 6.4.2). At The Crew Club, the majority of users of the MUGA are currently club members, who use the facility for free. The club has identified that trying to generate usage among a wider range of groups is crucial in underpinning sustainability and are branching out into the city (e.g. netball use by a local church group).
- 6.4.4. As discussed earlier in this report (paras. 5.7.9 to 5.7.14), sustainability could be usefully viewed in terms of clustering. Such an approach is used successfully by Westminster City Council in relation to the other sites they own (along with Paddington Recreation Ground). For example, the benefits and knowledge accrued from a well-used and sustainable site (e.g. Victoria) can help to offset some of the problems at a site which is not quite so strong (e.g. Queen's Park).
- 6.4.5 Market research and an analysis of local demand and competition should represent a fundamental (early) component of any business plan. This approach has been successfully utilised at Sittingbourne Community College. A decision to foreground football, rather than other activities, led to the implementation of a particular type of AGP surface (appropriate for football, but not adult, competitive rugby and hockey). This selection was based on knowledge of local participation patterns and desires, and the pitch has subsequently become fully booked throughout the season.
- 6.4.6 The potential conflict between 'success' and 'sustainability' agendas has been outlined in this report at some length (see paras. 5.7.2 and 6.4.3, and section 5.6). It is apparent that the most successful sites, in practice, are those that are able to balance community and commercial provision and participation.
- 6.4.7 Where football comprises the main activity, the capacity to use AGPs for alternative activities – and thus generate revenue – during the summer months represents a more sustainable approach (e.g. Sittingbourne Community College and Brighton Rugby Club).
- 6.4.8 The establishment of some form of forum where best practice can be shared would be welcomed by facilities.

7.0 Recommendations and conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

- 7.1.1 Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports staff and site personnel articulate different, individualised interpretations and conceptualisations of sustainability.
- 7.1.2 Nonetheless, in these contexts, sustainability tends to refer to the continual, long-term ability of a facility to provide high-quality participation activities.
- 7.1.3 The specific components of a facility and the context in which it operates are fundamental to any notion of sustainability. The key issue is therefore developing a range of generic criteria that can be interpreted and applied *in a specific manner that is appropriate for the individual site*.
- 7.1.4 Sustainability should be integrated fully with all other aspects of a facility's strategy, primarily the business plan and football/sport development plan that drive its overall direction.
- 7.1.5 It is appropriate to view sustainability as a process rather than a state. Furthermore, it is beneficial to understand notions of 'sustainable' and 'unsustainable' as existing along a continuum rather than as polar opposites.
- 7.1.6 A number of factors are important in the creation and maintenance of sustainability. These include: finance; governance and business planning; management, staffing and volunteering; location and accessibility; community "ownership"; community hubs; marketing and publicity; provision of additional activities; and partnerships.
- 7.1.7 There is a fine line between the provision of specialist/core activities and offering additional ones. It is important to have a regular client group which generates revenue, but diverse usage also provides an important contribution to sustainability, especially around issues of community ownership.
- 7.1.8 Projects must ascertain exactly what is needed and required from the group(s) they are working with. There must also be an awareness that these needs and demands will shift over time. Continual re-engagement and consultation is thus required.
- 7.1.9 A number of barriers can be identified that might affect the capacity for a facility to be sustainable. These can be institutional, attitudinal and/or practical barriers. They include issues related to finance, volunteers, the type of facility, and the type and variety of user groups.
- 7.1.10 Current monitoring and evaluation by the Football Foundation is comprehensive, rigorous and robust. ASAs, in particular, clearly play a significant role in contributing to the potential for, and documenting evidence of, sustainability at facilities.
- 7.1.11 Attempts to create sustainability may involve the pursuit of certain agendas that do not necessarily synchronise with other issues that football facilities are expected to engage with.
- 7.1.12 There is clearly support among Football Foundation staff for the idea of asset transfer.

7.1.13 It may be beneficial to view the idea of sustainability in terms of areas or clusters (at a municipal and/or regional level) rather than in relation to single facilities.

7.1.14 Facilities could make efficiency savings, namely in terms of teaming up with a number of other clubs and approaching a business or service for a package deal.

7.2. *Identifying sustainability*

7.2.1 This report has demonstrated that establishing a single, definitive meaning of sustainability – that can be applied to all types of facility – is a difficult task. However, in relation to Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facilities, it is evident that certain criteria are likely to be conducive to creating and maintaining sustainability.

7.2.2 In terms of defining sustainability with regard to the issues covered in this report, a sustainable Football Foundation/Barclays Spaces for Sports facility is likely to be one that:

- Has the ability to generate finance, from a range of sources, and put away an annual sinking fund in order to undertake maintenance and replacements
- Possesses a comprehensive business plan and football/sport development plan
- Has sophisticated management and operational systems, and embeds appropriate processes and procedures to facilitate the succession of expertise, skills and knowledge between volunteers
- Is accessible, safe, welcoming and not seen to be identified with a particular group to the exclusion of others
- Generates feelings of “ownership” within the local community, and consults and engages them in processes and decisions
- Provides spaces for non-football/sporting activities, such as classrooms, meeting rooms and social areas
- Is able to communicate its existence and activities to a wide range of (potential) participants
- Provides additional activities, such as coaching qualifications, referee training and First Aid training
- Is embedded in positive, functioning partnerships with local (and possibly regional) agencies and organisations
- Has ascertained what is needed and required by the group(s) it is working with
- Strikes an appropriate balance between community and commercial provision

7.3 *Recommendations*

7.3.1 Notions of sustainability should be considered by organisations and embedded in their projects *right from the very beginning*, and should be revisited, reassessed and, if necessary, re-implemented throughout the lifespan of the project.

7.3.2 Facilities should be informed and educated about the importance of embedding long-term sustainability strategies alongside their capacity to respond to everyday concerns.

- 7.3.3 It might be valuable to proceed beyond notions of sustainability that conceptualise it as being linked to – or limited to – a particular facility or project, and to focus on trying to ensure that the *activity* or *the opportunity* is sustainable as well.
- 7.3.4 Models of best practice and identified prerequisites about sustainability should be made available to facilities.
- 7.3.5 Market research and an analysis of local demand and competition should represent a fundamental (early) component of any business plan.
- 7.3.6 Understanding and assessment of what is sustainable at a particular facility should be collaboratively established by facility staff and Football Foundation personnel.
- 7.3.7 It would be productive to have a programme in place to support and mentor volunteers at facility sites.
- 7.3.8 Local communities should be consulted (where appropriate) and engaged from the application stage in any project. A wide range of interest groups should be included and the formation of a steering group possesses clear benefits.
- 7.3.9 Embedding the expertise and skills to identify and monitor issues around sustainability *within facilities themselves* would be a productive development.
- 7.3.10 Specific issues around sustainability need to be embedded within any monitoring and evaluation process.
- 7.3.11 Qualitative measures and a focus on *outcomes* as well as outputs would be a welcome addition to existing monitoring and evaluation processes.
- 7.3.12 It might be useful to audit the participation of volunteers, and evaluate the support mechanisms that are in place to assist their work.
- 7.3.13 Monitoring may need to be undertaken to ensure that facilities do not allocate their sites just to the most reliable, profitable and/or easy-to-manage users.
- 7.3.14 The Football Foundation might assist facilities in making efficiency savings, namely in terms of teaming up with a number of other clubs and approaching a business or service for a package deal.
- 7.3.15 Community steering groups can help to ensure that the diversity of park users and their interests are represented in all aspects of provision, and can act as a conduit for collecting community feedback. The creation of local/regional steering groups, rather than those simply based at individual facilities, is also worth exploring.
- 7.3.16 The Football Foundation might want to explore the idea of some form of forum where best practice can be shared.

8.0 Author biography

Dr. Daniel Burdsey is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the Centre for Sport Research (CSR) at the University of Brighton. His research to date has focused on issues of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism in the context of sport (primarily football), leisure and popular culture. This work is published in a number of international journals including *Cultural Sociology*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Leisure Studies*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, *Sociology*, *Sociology of Sport Journal* and *Sociological Review*. He is also the author of *British Asians and Football: Culture, Identity, Exclusion* (Routledge, 2007) and the editor of *Race, Ethnicity and Football: Persisting Debates and Emergent Issues* (Routledge, 2011). Daniel is currently involved in a project investigating the relationship between professional football and its communities, primarily the social and cultural impact of the construction of new stadia on local spaces and places.

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