



Sport Positive Leagues - Environmental Sustainability Matrix

English Premier League 2022/23: All your questions answered

We have collated questions we have received about our Sport Positive Leagues this year and in previous years, so you can further understand how and why we work the way we do.

How do you choose the categories?

When we started off this work 4 years ago, we spoke to the clubs about the key areas we know that operationally football has an impact on the environment and focussed on the stadium; energy generation, energy efficiency, travel to games, the food that is consumed, how waste and water are managed. We also wanted to add a category on the way clubs communicate their work, as the power of sport to combat the climate crisis by connecting with fans and citizens is unrivalled.

We chose not to add the carbon footprint of clubs, as many clubs then did not have this information, although some are starting to have it now. So this category would have been moot for the most part. By extension we chose not to include the embedded carbon of the stadium when it was built; as stadiums vary in age, some have undergone/are undergoing extensions, or new stadiums are being built. Getting concrete data (pun intended) from clubs on the amount of embedded carbon in their stadium would have been difficult too. All new stadiums now have sustainability at their core, so it wasn't deemed as useful a category to include. We want to focus on categories where clubs can drive positive behaviours now.

In 2020 we kept the same categories, but made it difficult to get the top points. To get the higher points, clubs had to be progressing by working strategically and with policies in place – thereby showing that there was buy-in at the highest level of the organisation to tackle environmental sustainability. We also gave top points for efforts extending beyond the stadium, and into training facilities, academies and staff offices.

For 2021, we have extended this again to keep making it more difficult to get those top points. Added new categories on 'education' and 'biodiversity', and have separated out 'commitments'.

Training and education of staff, teams, fans and youth groups are crucial if we want to continue to progress and amplify this work, as well as ensure people understand why taking action on climate change is so important and how it will impact the game we love. Biodiversity and nature are crucial to our healthy lives; football clubs have a good amount of green space that they can nurture to support our ecosystems, as well as strong reach into their communities to drive positive action - this is something we want to encourage and applaud. Commitment and policy have been separated into their own category (previously it had been included with Communications and Engagement) as we know that when sports organisations make external commitments to tackle climate change, by setting net zero targets or publicising goals, they are much more likely to reach them.

For 2022/23, we have made a number of categories much more difficult to receive top points in. For example by including points for public reporting of Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, entirely eradicating single use plastic, clubs not having flown domestically to games in the last 12 months or training all of their players on environmental sustainability. A lot of these are aspirational, but we're starting to see clubs doing some of these already.

We extended the categories to include Sustainable Procurement, underlining the capacity football has to drive much larger positive environmental and social impacts through its work with suppliers of goods and services. We have also included Ownership/Sponsorship, to share information on the source of wealth of club owners, as well as all sponsors and sustainability activations that are happening, wider information on the organisation that people should be aware of. Awareness raising is a step we can take, and we hope to progress further by partnering with another organisation to provide a thoughtful ranking just on club sponsors and owners in the future. To read more about this, check out our OpEd here ([link](#))

Do the clubs know about this?

Yes, we work collaboratively with the clubs and they provide and verify all information that is published, they also see all the information and the matrix before it is published, in order to provide additional feedback. Working with the clubs directly is a cornerstone of this work.

How do you think the clubs are doing in regard to improvement?

We are really pleased to see strong progress in how the majority of clubs are approaching environmental sustainability, from commitments, new strategies and ever developing reach. They are all on a journey – each within the ethos of their own club – to reduce their environmental impact and bring their fans and stakeholders along with them.

Since the last time we released the table in February 2022, two more clubs have joined UN Sports for Climate Action Framework and set net zero targets; Wolverhampton Wanderers and Newcastle FC. Now 7 clubs have net zero emissions targets; Arsenal, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, Southampton, Manchester City, Wolves and Newcastle – as well as the Premier League itself.

Four clubs also now publish their carbon footprint, including scope 1, 2 and 3. We've seen improvements in the release of more sustainability strategies, and are heartened by all the work in the pipeline for the next 12 months.

Whilst you might just scan the table at a glance, please take the time to click through to full information, where you will see a myriad of incredible efforts to learn from. The links are under 'More Information' when you have clicked into a club's top line efforts in our table.

Isn't the climate crisis too important to be seen to compete about?

The climate and biodiversity crises are the most important issues of our time. As sports fans, we are all very comfortable with league tables and leader boards. For football fans it is second nature to talk about how their club is going in the league. It's hard, if not impossible, to take competition out of sport, but this work is not about pitting one club against another, the league table element is a means to an end, not the end itself. Whilst we know not everyone will agree with the way we do this, we make our peace with the fact we know categorially it has led to clubs moving forward with key efforts more quickly, and at scale.

When we first started this work, we looked at collating all the work that clubs are doing into a report, but it would have been very lengthy and not easily digestible. So after doing some audience research we decided to do a league table to make it more accessible to both industry folks and to football fans. Clubs' would be doing this work anyway, but our league has been cited a number of times by clubs themselves as a driving force to show internally how they are doing compared to their peers which has led to action. This wouldn't necessarily have happened with other formats we could have chosen.

We always underline the point that no matter where your team falls, every single team is doing some great work. There are things to be proud of, no matter who you support. And if you don't like the fact your club is lower down, let them know it's important to you. We need fans to tell sports organisations that they care, it will lead to more action.

My team seems to be doing more work in certain areas, but has the same points as other teams doing less, why is that?

The points system we use is threshold based, so once a club reaches a certain threshold we allocate the points to them. That's not to say that club doing lots above that threshold shouldn't be celebrated for doing great work in the areas they excel at, and the club and the environment are benefitting from that. This table is a yardstick, not totally exhaustive.

Some clubs have sponsors/partners that are big carbon emitters. How can you rank club's environmental sustainability without taking who owns them or who finances them into account?

Right now our work is focused on the operational impacts and reach of football clubs to be pragmatic about increasing action and ambition. There is a larger context to consider, but it is a complex landscape and it is something we want to continue to integrate in a thoughtful way.

As well as considering the industry that sponsorship money comes from and the environmental impact of that, we would also need to look at the overall ethos of that company and their work to reduce environmental impact, as well as how sponsorship money is spent. This year we have used the opportunity to add a Sponsorship and Ownership category, to raise awareness and highlight sustainability activations. We are still speaking to collaborators to integrate this in a fair and thoughtful way going forward, that supports positive change in the future. Again, read our OpEd here for more info ([link](#))

Why haven't you got something specifically on football team's flying domestically to games, surely that's a big impact?

This year we incorporated top points for our 'Sustainable Transport' category if the club hasn't taken a domestic flight to a game in the past 12 months.

This has become a very visible and polarising element of football and sustainability, especially with the [BBC's recent research](#) that was published in March 2023, this year's Sport Positive Leagues research was concluded before this was published.

We know the actual carbon emissions for the flights are quite low within a football club's overall carbon footprint, but agree it should be addressed, as a role model issue, as well as the environmental impact. Clubs generally cite reasons for flying to games as the inability to book train carriages far enough in advance, train strikes and reliability, length of distance travelled and time it would take, recovery needs and competitive advantage, instead of trains or road travel.

Sitting inside the industry, we understand these reasons but still want to encourage lower carbon impact alternatives – it is tricky however when we see the UK Government slashing duties on domestic flights to [encourage people to travel internally](#) in the UK (from April 1 2023). We have to tackle this in a joined up way, as whole systems change is needed.

Why don't you have an FA Women's Super League version of this?

We have started working on this, but the infrastructure and resources that go into women's football is behind the men's game unfortunately, meaning that getting hold of the data we need to do a similar matrix of work is much more difficult. However, we continue to commit to making this happen, even if it means taking a different approach to the effort.

If any organisation within the FA Women's Super League infrastructure wishes to help support us with data collection on this, please [get in touch](#).

Do you have a question that hasn't been answered?

Contact us via our website here: <https://www.sportpositiveleagues.com/contact/>

Thanks,

The Sport Positive Leagues Team