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**Sports  
for Nature**



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# Football for Nature

A new guide for action

Discussion paper: Shared with the  
football community for feedback

Founding partners



International  
Olympic  
Committee



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



DONA BERTARELLI  
PHILANTHROPY

Outlined below is an 11 Point Plan as to how a professional football club could contribute to Sports for Nature. It can be used by Leagues or National Federations as guidance and has been designed for professional clubs who want to consider what further actions they could take to deliver for nature through their clubs.

It has a British flavour as it and has been built with insight from individuals at Tottenham Hotspur, Brentford FC, Brighton and Hove Albion, the English Football League (EFL) together with examples from Wolfsburg and Stuttgart, as well as being informed by the [Sports for Nature Urban Playbook](#). The aim is that this white paper will be launched as a full Sports for Nature resource in 2026 following feedback from the football community.

## Phase 1

### Build from the Back (Steps 1 - 5)

#### 1. Understand what's possible: Identify spaces and the opportunity for action, with fans considered at kick off:

- **Take a tour:** Getting started can be hard. People are busy. But just getting key colleagues out and walking around the stadia / training ground to explore “what would we do for nature” is as good as any place to begin, the ideas and opportunities emerge collectively so that co-ownership is routed from the outset.
- **Get all levels involved:** the groundsman, CFO, or colleagues in operations who have interest and agency to take this discussion forward.
- **Use existing tools:** As referred to above, The [Sports for Nature Urban Playbook](#) contains great examples as to how to map and understand the opportunities for restoring landscapes in your environment. Use this as your compass, but when you're exploring the estate/s consider what role the fans could play, you may be surprised as to how interested they might be.

#### What could this look like?

Wolfsburg FC have developed a flagship initiative at the VfL Forest, a long-term reforestation project that has planted over 2,000 native trees in Wolfsburg's urban forest. The project actively involves fans, players, and local authorities, strengthening community engagement in conservation efforts. Supporting this initiative. At the Volkswagen Arena, Wolfsburg has significantly reduced water consumption by irrigating pitches with 11 million litres of reclaimed greywater annually and installing water-saving fixtures throughout the venue.

#### What could this look like?

Tottenham Hotspur are measuring bird populations at their training ground through an advanced biodiversity monitoring system to identify the birdlife at the ground and as noted above, Brentford have invested to enhance ecosystems and build resilience around the training ground and at the GTech stadium.



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### 2. Build a business case to save on costs and deliver for nature.

How much will it cost will be the first barrier you hit. But there is a business case for this work with cost savings available. The context will vary, but ideas range from:

- Fans support this work, building engagement locally:** [A survey of fans at Brentford FC](#) showed that they rated the importance of sustainability as 8.1 out of 10 with 64% of fans wanting to hear more about the work, with “waste” and “more engagement” the key priorities. Brentford also now sit on the Hounslow Nature Action plan and have worked to invest 54 biodiversity units around the training ground, including the GTech Community Garden. Brighton also invested in local tree planting in support of the Women’s Rugby World Cup.
- Less is more. Action can save on the bottom line:** Severe droughts across Europe over recent summers have seen the price of water rising for some clubs to the extent that it is now a material cost, with one club in the UK saying that water bills rose by 50% in 2025 due to changes in rates, with hose-pipe bans also affecting availability of this critical asset.
- Nature builds resilience:** In the UK, Chelsea FC lost 23 training pitches to flooding in 2022 and Brentford FC’s second pitch at Wheatsheaf Park is susceptible to flooding. Investing in nature based solutions can keep training pitches available and avoid disruption, particularly for youth teams that may be playing on more marginal pitches.
- Nature could\* enhance performance:** The evidence on this is still emerging and this is an area that we hope will be expanded through the discussions.

#### What could this look like?

Using gray water, harvesting and using low-flow systems will be critical. Tottenham Hotspur have reduced water use on the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium by 60% through a moisture measurement system with sensors identifying when the pitch has been sufficiently watered. Understanding the soil health and humus level of the pitches is something all groundsmen consider, good agronomy practices which reduce the use of inputs on pitches can also reduce overheads.

#### What could this become?

In 2021, Borussia Dortmund introduced a “[City Nature Tour](#)” around their headquarters, adding wildflower meadows, “shadow oases,” snack gardens, and insect habitats to support biodiversity and create green pockets where players and staff can take restorative walks or breaks, with Brentford planning to begin a Recovery Garden at the training ground.



# Phase 1

Build from the Back (Steps 1 - 5)

## 3. Look over the hedge: Neighbours are keen to help.

- Identify your space:** Investing in enhancements around the stadia / training ground is likely to be the fastest place to begin. Once you have identified a location for conservation / restoration investment, talk to local groups in the council or with local organisations (for example in the UK, the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust, Woodland Trust or RSPB) to see if there are pre-existing initiatives you could build on locally. Having a trusted partner to work with and collaborate with on this agenda will make a big difference, the local council will have ideas.
- Look for help:** If you have a good University / local college, it may be local academics or experts in your community who will have thoughts on what might be possible. If you have a Foundation, they'll likely have the best contacts in the community, know what is possible and who to speak to and could work to activate the space for you. The Foundation could be your foundation for this work.

### What could this look like?

An example of this can be found on the South Downs close to Brighton & Hove Albion FC, the club are exploring what they could collectively do to enhance this ecosystem, talking with Sussex County Cricket Club and knowledge partners (University of Sussex / Brighton) to explore how they can support action in this domain.

## 4. Decide on your focus

- Targets:** Without targets and a clear focus, it will be hard to know if you're making progress. There are already a set of targets for nature for governments, tools with Sports for Nature under development and one of the key goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework is to re-store and conserve 30% of the world's land and seascapes by 2030.
- Depending on scope, resources and ambition you have three choices:
  - Restore and conserve nature on your estate and in your community (suggest-ed focus 30%):** Good place to begin, important as it's visible to all, dividend for nature is localised. You'll need to factor in a maintenance budget to keep things ticking over, many young trees need three years of care to ensure they are established.
  - Explore the impact on nature in your value chain (suggested focus 50%):** This is harder but addressing this will have a higher impact on nature as a result of your supply chain choices. It would require internal buy in and a deeper dive to explore the challenges / opportunities for progress. As noted below, catering would be a good place to begin given the impact that industrial agriculture can have on biodiversity.
  - Engage the fan base in this work (suggested focus 20%):** Influencing and en-gaging fans is where your influence will be outsized. This is really important, once you have made progress in terms of action.
- A new tool from Sports for Nature is in design (due out in 2026) which will give you a set of KPIs

# Phase 1

Build from the Back (Steps 1 - 5)

that you can measure. KPIs will likely include:

## a. Conservation and restoration

- Biodiversity baseline and net-gain % for nature at the club, including tree cover / habitat targets
- Species count (baseline + number of new species recorded)
- Connectivity improvements

## b. Resource use

- Pesticide use reduction units
- Water use reduction units

## c. Value chain

- Baseline use / sales of meat-based vs plant based food
- Draw down on nature through other capital choices

## d. Resilience

- Investments that reduce flood risks or heating impacts

## e. Fan knowledge / engagement

- Pre / post surveys in interest and support for club work of players, fans

## What could this look like?

[Wolverhampton Wanderers FC](#) launched the One Pack, One Planet program featuring four key commitments to environmental sustainability, including nature and with the publication every year they publish an annual sustainability report. [Brentford FC's strategy](#) is a holistic appraisal on action they will be taking across a range of areas.

## 5. Get the right names on the team-sheet

- **Pick the team:** Once you have a plan, working with 2-3 people to be part of the delivery team can make a huge difference at the Club.
- **What could this look like?** They could be from the grounds staff, the CFO, one of the players, you'll find more people interested than you might think. For example, the Strength and Conditioning coach could turn out to be much more interested than you realised.



## Phase 2

# High press through the Midfield (Steps 6 - 8)

### 6. Close in on Catering

- **It starts on the plate:** While it is hard to see it with our own eyes, the food choices we put on our plates is where we make the greatest difference as individuals for nature. Industrial agriculture and the meat industry are one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss. Working with sponsors, suppliers and partners to consider what contribution they can make on this agenda, assessing if your catering can include more plant-based options or low-carbon beer.
- **Local, where possible:** Locally sourced food can connect your community to a new and less nature intensive relationship with food.

### 7. Ask sponsors and suppliers sign up for nature

- Getting sponsors and suppliers to consider what they can do on this agenda is where impact can scale. This will need to be timed around contract renewal, insights from fans and an analysis of where you can have the greatest impact.



### What could this look like?

- Tottenham Hotspur have set internal targets to further increase the proportion of vegan, vegetarian, and plant-forward food options - which prioritises plant ingredients without eliminating all animal based products - across General Admission menus, currently standing at 40%.
- Newark & Sherwood United adopted a fully vegan policy for both players and fans—serving only plant-based food at matches, with many players embracing the diet too.

### What could this look like?

- **Sustainability sponsor:** At Wolfsburg, the local energy and utility provider, Landschaftsverband Wolfsburg (LSW), donates one euro per kilometre run by the team to fund future reforestation.
- **Supplier check list:** Choose vendors who align with values that align with the goals of this agenda. One example is through Adidas who partnered with Parley for the Oceans to create football kits made from recycled ocean plastic collected from coastal clean-ups.
- In November 2018, [Real Madrid and Bayern Munich](#) wore these eco-friendly kits in La Liga and Bundesliga matches to raise awareness about marine pollution. The kits featured minimal branding to maintain sustainability and highlight environmental responsibility.

## Phase 2

### High press through the Midfield (Steps 6 - 8)

#### 8. Educate and inspire (by showing, not telling)

- **Show, don't tell:** You can't talk about a garden if the garden isn't there. Education comes once the rest of the work is in place. Doing it through the lens of "showing not telling" so that the work that the club is doing for nature feels like the right-thing-to-do and comes from a place of being connected and committed to the community the club is in.
- There is an emerging toolkit of actions that clubs can take, which range from:
  - ⇒ **Listen, and trust the fans:** Surveying the fans to see what their interests are, offering a chance to listen and discuss ideas might give you 100 or even 1000 people to act on this work, which is more than the 1 FTE you have at the club.
  - ⇒ **Look to your past and your story:** Many clubs have nature as part of their badge, story and narrative, finding a progressive and optimistic way of telling that story is something to discuss with colleagues in the Communications Division.
  - ⇒ **Give space for nature:** Give space for nature in your communications, ad hoardings and commercial space so that your support for nature is known about in your communications channels.
  - ⇒ **Find a great ambassador to talk about it:** Identify 1 player to champion this issue, talk about it in a way that is authentic to them and their identity so they can speak on behalf of both their interests and the clubs (eg "My favourite place") work which can go out across club channels, programmes, media outlets. In your player survey - if you run them - you could ask the question of what players are happy to talk about, your player liaison team could identify the right person to speak on this.
  - ⇒ **Kits with a message:** While new kits are a whole separate discussion, Watford FC's 2025/6 kit is sold with a 50p contribution to help the local councils plant 1.8 million new trees by 2030.
  - ⇒ **Choose 2-3 dates a year:** Earth Day (April 22), World Environment Day (June 5) all offer good moments to talk about the work that the club is taking on this agenda, choose a day and make that a key tentpole moment for the club.
  - ⇒ **Educate, educate, educate:** Work on a short training course for the Youth Team, Players and Grounds Staff to consider what they could do on this agenda. [Stuttgart FC have a 400 m Nature Trail](#) at the training ground that is monitored and measured with the support of a University where fans and youth teams and school children can explore this environment at their premises.

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## Phase 3

### Go on the Attack (Steps 9 - 11)

#### 9. Celebrate progress

- Celebrate the progress you're making so that it becomes a source of pride with progress shared through social media, events and ambassadors.
- **Build and participate in events:** Green Football Weekend is a flagship UK initiative held annually—usually the first weekend of February—to channel football's reach toward climate action and sustainability and announcing new, more ambitious commitments. [Manchester United Foundation](#) won the Green Football Cup during Green Football Weekend 2024 by encouraging fans to complete over 4,000 eco-actions like cycling, meat-free meals, and energy-saving efforts
- **Apply for awards:** Forest Green Rovers named Elite Organisation of the Year at the [BBC Green Sports Awards 2023](#), recognized as the “greenest football club in the world”.



#### 10. Scale up: Get others on board

- Involve and inspire players, coaches, fans and the whole community by letting them know how they can support this team effort.
- Teaming up with rivals in your neighbourhood (that you normally compete) is a great way of working together on this agenda. You'll likely share the same ecosystem and could team up to maximise the impact.
- **Spread the word:** Amy James-Turner, a player for Tottenham Hotspur Women's team, and Planet League, a sustainability-focused organisation, were awarded the Feature of the Year at the BASIS Awards for their pioneering report titled "[Women's Football and Climate Change: The Players' Perspective](#)." This report, the first of its kind, brought together the voices of over 110 professional footballers from 36 different clubs to raise awareness about the urgent issue of climate change and its impact on football.

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## Go on the Attack (Steps 9 - 11)

### 11. Ratchet, review, reward and reset plans for the next season

From season to season, be more and more ambitious and aim for continual improvement with new commitments and by monitoring progress, analysing current actions and impact which can then be ratcheted and reviewed.

- Set yourself a Biodiversity Score for your landscape and see if you could improve the net-gain score year - BNG experts can support you to set the score and see how this can improve year on year.
- **Build yearly sustainability and nature plan:** [“Game Plan” sustainability report](#) from Manchester City Football Club (20th edition) is published yearly, reporting 16% drop in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and major reductions in energy, water, waste, plus biodiversity gains (14 new species noted; over 500 species on site).
- **Scale up at the city, county and federation level:** Explore how you can scale up this work in your ecosystem so that your leadership becomes normative with others. For example, the [Premier League’s official sustainability commitment made in early 2024](#) - all 20 clubs of its teams deliver “robust sustainability policies” - along with strong recommendations for net zero roadmaps and ESG reporting - in an effort to create a culture of eco-consciousness within the league. Bringing nature into these plans as an ally for climate is an area for future discussion.

