

Greening the game: How Man City FC has put sustainability at the heart of its journey to the top

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12 May 2017, source [edie newsroom](#)

On the back of Manchester City Football Club partnering with an energy storage company, edie takes a closer look at how the club has incorporated sustainable business practices into its multi-billion pound transformation, in line with its rise up the Premier League table.



As the City Football business has grown, so too has the campus and its subsequent energy use

There's a common yet expletive question posed to fans of newly-rich football teams, essentially asking them where they were before the money rolled in. For some, it's the litmus test of football purity, designed to separate the modern-day, fair-weather match goers from the traditional, hardened fans.

Man City's director of estate development Peter Bradshaw is most definitely the latter. Bradshaw started supporting the club in 1963. He's seen The Sky Blues relegated to the third tier of English football before experiencing the dizzying heights of the Champions League and Premier League victory.

The club's growth has been financed by Abu Dhabi United Group Investment & Development Limited (ADUG), which owns an 86% majority share in the club. A football club funded by oil-rich owners with a stadium named after an airline doesn't sound like the most obvious place to find an authentic passion for sustainability. But, as Bradshaw explains, this is a club that lives for its community.

"The most important thing for us is responsible behaviour," Bradshaw tells edie at the club's London office in Kings Cross. "Like every business, the important thing for us is that we are living in a world that is underlined by viability and best value. Those things drive everything that we do, but we're a club that was formed as a

community project in 1880 and the values of local engagement and community and best behaviour are absolutely cornerstones of what we do today.

“When we look at energy and sustainability, it’s about making sure that every measure is understood with regards to human impact and what our actions will have on others.”

Man City's continued growth and ambition on the footballing front - supported by the signing of a number of high-profile players - has been matched off the pitch. ADUG signed a 10-year partnership with Manchester City Council to revamp the land surrounding the stadium, paving the way for creation of the 'Etihad campus'.

Development of the campus saw the club transform a largely derelict, toxic and unusable heavy industry estate into a community and business hub, now home to the City Football Academy; the National Squash Centre; the Manchester Institute of Health and Performance; the National Indoor BMX centre and the Velodrome.



The campus development was undertaken with sustainability acting as a central focus. All existing structures on-site were re-used, and no waste materials were sent to landfill.

As the City Football business has grown, so too has the campus and its subsequent energy use. Bradshaw feels that the group is now at a point where it needs to examine its long-term habits and find new avenues that can facilitate for expanded growth while keeping energy costs down.

City has learnt on the pitch that buying high-profile names doesn't always yield results. Again, this learning process has seemingly been mirrored off the pitch with initial attempts to create high-profile on-site renewable energy projects. The business agreed to a construction project for an 85-metre wind turbine with a 2MW capacity adjacent to its stadium. However, this project was eventually cancelled due to fears that falling ice from the turbines could injure matchday fans.



Instead, the football club has incorporated a range of more modest energy systems to lower emissions. Tri-generation systems, absorption chillers, combined heat & power systems (CHP) all help to export electricity internally and externally to the grid.

Air-source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting, bore hole water and LED lighting have also been fitted across the campus to deliver results. All waste water from ground activities is recycled and re-used across the City Football Academy and the Etihad Stadium, while the 5,272 LED lamps have helped to reduce energy use in the stadium by nearly one million kWh.

Partners in stoppage time

The club has recently announced a 15% drop in fugitive energy – energy used on unoccupied rooms, spaces and appliances – but Bradshaw feels that the campus is operating at peak energy demand. And with a new University campus set to arrive on site in the coming years, Manchester City is reaching outwards through its partnership portfolio to examine new ways of reducing energy.

The club had already partnered with Japanese carmaker Nissan as the official automotive partner of the group. Nissan is also a leader in the electric vehicle (EV) transition, to the point where it is now examining how cars can feed energy back into the grid. This research programme, as well as yielding [trials in London](#), has seen Nissan partner with US-based battery storage developers Eaton. The partnership has seen Eaton's xStorage batteries used in EVs, but the models also serve a purpose for domestic storage use and can also incorporate recycled EV batteries.

Eaton is one of the first companies in the UK to promote second-life batteries for more affordable domestic use, and this has caught the interest of Manchester City, who announced the US firm as [an official energy partner](#). Limited-edition versions of its xStorage energy storage system, labelled with Manchester City's badge, will go on sale this summer and Eaton will use the partnership to promote the product on wider marketing channels.

Speaking at the launch of the partnership last week, City Football Group's chief commercial officer Tom Glick outlined the purpose of the partnership, noting that "phase two" could see City Football trial energy storage on the Etihad campus.

"We have a brand-new campus with evolving energy needs," Glick said. "Phase two could involve a solution for the stadium and the wider campus, but today it's just about the announcement and to help bring this project to life and reach a bigger audience."

But will an audience who's primary interest is football engage with the product when the football club itself isn't yet willing to use it? Glick claimed that spreading this message will have to be done "authentically" in order to capture attentions in the right way, "but not during a throw-in or freekick".



Moneyball approach

For Bradshaw, potential energy storage units could work at the campus, provided they can account for increased demand and, of course, are affordable.

It might sound strange for a football club that spent £47.5m on an English defender in the summer to balk at potential price ranges. Eaton's second-life battery costs £4,250 excluding VAT and installation costs, or 0.009% of that transfer fee. Obviously, the campus energy needs dwarf the 3.5kWh output of the batteries, but as a business, City Football Group is exploring astute options before jumping in with a concept that is still in its infancy.

"It looks like a very real and exciting option for the future," Bradshaw notes. "There's nothing in place yet and there's a lot of work to do with Eaton to turn it into reality. We need a period now to look at how valuable a big industrial-scale battery unit is. It's got to be affordable, give benefits and in sustainability terms, we need to examine what it does to our carbon footprint.

"I would love to say we'll be carbon neutral in the future, but it's too bold a statement to make. It's a fantastic vision to have, but what we're trying to do is be efficient as we possibly can. This won't just come from energy, but a basket of activities."

This basket, which includes City Football Academy being built to the highest LEED building standards and enhanced recycling measures, will also be expanded as City Football Group's empire expands.

The club's owners moved to create a new American club four years ago - New York City FC is now nestled under the City Football Group umbrella alongside Melbourne City and Japanese team Yokohama F Marinos. All of the teams are independent from one another but signify City Football's attempts to branch out globally. [The Guardian recently described](#) each team as "having their own cultures" and, while that may be the case, Bradshaw concludes that the sustainability ethos set in Manchester will also branch out globally.

"Every product that we buy, we can trace where it was made and what it was made from and whether those companies employ local people and source locally. This is important to us - from apprentices to training opportunities and sustainability this will apply in New York, in Melbourne and in Yokohama. These behaviours are really important for all our footprints."

Matt Mace

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