



2023-24 Season Review

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Participation
- 4 Women and Girls
- 6 Disability
- 8 Coaching
- 10 Referees
- 12 Facilities
- 14 Safeguarding
- 16 County Cups
- 18 Administration
- 20 Governance
- 21 The County Ground
- 22 Grassroots Awards
- 24 Partners
- 25 Key Measures



Introduction

Hertfordshire FA CEO Karl Lingham looks back on 2023-24

The summer provides all of us involved in the game with an opportunity to look back at how things have gone over the last year, before preparing to push on again with all the hope and expectation that a new season brings.

For us the end of the season also marked the end of a three-year strategy period, so we have been focused on meeting the goals we had set for ourselves back in 2021 to help the game recover and rebuild following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

It was clear then that football would have a key role to play in helping repair the damage to our collective mental and physical health from long periods of inactivity and isolation. Today we can say that grassroots football has bounced back brilliantly and we continue to see growing levels of participation across the game.

The strength and resilience of local leagues and clubs have been reinforced by the continued drive to raise standards through England Football Accreditation, while at the same time we've seen the further development of new formats that allow more people than ever to enjoy the benefits of playing the game.

Of course, with increased participation comes more pressure on facilities. We are proud to work closely with clubs to help them access investment so they can create great places to play football and offer opportunities for everyone in their local communities.

In addition to opening a number of new 3G pitches there has also been a significant effort in recent years to improve the quality of grass pitches and through a combination of funding and expert support, we are really starting to see the impact of this across the county.

Also fundamental to the long term health of the game is fostering a positive environment for everyone to enjoy. This year we have supported new measures and initiatives aimed at improving behaviour on and off the pitch, from Silent Support Weekends in youth football, to tougher sanctions against repeat offenders.

We also work hard to protect young and vulnerable people in the game from harm and are proud to have once again passed an independent assessment carried out by the NSPCC across every aspect of our operation in relation to The FA's Safeguarding standards.

At the same time we continue to make great strides in working toward compliance with The FA Code of Governance, which aims to drive the highest standards of corporate governance and ensure that the voices of stakeholders from all areas of the game can be heard.

The development of our Inclusion Advisory Group along with the newly formed Youth Council have been crucial to ensuring everyone can share their views on the future of football.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the help of others and we are always grateful to those who give their time to make football happen. It has been a pleasure to work with so many of you over the last year, improving standards and increasing opportunities throughout the county.

Karl Lingham
CEO and Senior Safeguarding Lead,
Hertfordshire FA

Participation

Creating more opportunities to play

As the not-for-profit governing body of football in Hertfordshire, one of our key goals is to grow participation. We know football can have a positive impact on people's lives and want to ensure that everyone has somewhere to play and develop their love of the game.

We do this by working to create an environment in which football can flourish, supporting the delivery of quality provision, promoting diversity and regulating the sport for everyone to enjoy.

Building stronger clubs and leagues

At the heart of this is England Football Accreditation, a scheme which sets out standards for clubs and leagues. As well as promoting a positive football environment, it also encourages them to have strong structures behind the scenes, making them more sustainable and resilient.

Hertfordshire has long had one of the strongest club networks in the country and we're proud to see how many have shown their commitment to high standards, with 95% of youth clubs now being Accredited.

The adult game is increasingly seeing the benefit of Accreditation too. By creating an experience that is better aligned to what they have known in youth football, clubs have seen more young players make the transition into adult teams, helping to reverse the long-term trend of declining participation in areas of the game such as adult male 11v11.

Why Growing the Game Matters

It's not just for fun! Studies show that football not only benefits the mental and physical health of participants, but also helps to build confidence and a sense of community, reducing crime and improving educational outcomes

By changing lives for the better and helping to take pressure off public services, grassroots football creates significant value both for wider society and the local economy

£200m+
Economic and Social Value per year



Hertfordshire Football in Numbers

42,497
Male Players

7,651
Female Players

631
Disability Players

56%

Increase in Women and Girls playing in Hertfordshire over the last three seasons



Women and Girls

Building on the legacy of the Lionesses

Female football had already been growing rapidly for many years but the success of the Lionesses in winning Euro 2022 created an unprecedented opportunity to transform access to football for women and girls.

As well as supporting existing clubs and leagues to grow their female provision, this has also included helping to develop new places to play, along with a campaign to ensure girls have equal access to play at school.

Herts Women's Walking Football League

This season saw the launch of the all-new walking football league providing organised regular fixtures for women over the age of 40, building on the growth in recreational sessions that have sprung up at sites across the county in recent years.

Teams from all over Hertfordshire and surrounding counties met up once a month to play a series of organised fixtures at a single venue. In many cases, this gave women who were denied the chance to play in their youth a first taste of competitive football.

Biggest Ever Football Session

Coinciding with International Women's Day, a record-breaking 465,000 girls from 5,000 schools across England took part in the Biggest Ever Football Session as part of The FA's 'Let Girls Play' campaign to demand equal access to football for young girls.

This year event saw more registrations than ever, with 71% of the schools who signed up not having done so before. In Hertfordshire we saw 125 schools get involved in the initiative, with one particular session hosting over 600 girls.

England Football Community Programmes in Hertfordshire

36

Wildcats

12

Squad Girls Football

5

Just Play

5

Play-On Pilots

Disability

Supporting a more inclusive game

Although there is some excellent disability provision in the county, we know that access to opportunities can vary. The chance to play and be part of a team can be transformative for young people, so there has been a focus on breaking down barriers and helping all clubs feel they are in a position to offer disability football.

Training and Toolkit for Clubs

This season saw the launch of new training and an online toolkit designed to help clubs on their Journey to Inclusion, with resources to support them at every step towards embedding disability football in their club culture, both on and off the pitch.

In support of this initiative we hosted a free in-person workshop at The County Ground, giving clubs the chance to learn direct from those with hands on experience of growing disability football, as well as the chance to network with others looking to do the same.

Comets Takes Off

Comets is a recreational, pan-disability football offer for children with a disability aged 5-11, with resources provided to help deliver a programme focused on helping disabled children have fun, whilst building confidence, independence and social relationships.

It's designed to give clubs the confidence to engage disabled players with a fun introduction to football, helping grow this pathway. Since its launch in early 2024, we've been able to support the opening of two sessions in Hertfordshire, with many more in the pipeline.



European Champions!

Hertfordshire based Aspire PFC made history in June, becoming the first English club to win the EPFA Champions Cup. This builds on their numerous FA Disability Cup wins in recent years and is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all involved at the club.

33%

Increase in disabled players
in Hertfordshire over
previous season



Coaching

Inspiring the next generation

Ask any footballer who they rank as the most important influence on their career and almost all would make reference to a coach, past or present. Most would not be where they are today without the help and guidance of one or more inspirational coaches.

We're committed to supporting aspiring coaches through every stage of their journey, as they create safe, fun and inclusive football environments where players can develop their skills and build a lifelong love of the game.

While responsibility for delivery of the main FA Coaching Courses has moved away from counties to FA Education since the pandemic, we continue to provide a range of learning opportunities both online and in person for those looking to improve their knowledge and skills.

"This year has seen coaches engage in FA courses and various ongoing learning opportunities across the county. It not only shows the commitment they have for their own development but for the development of their players"

Danielle Evans, Coach Development Officer



Ongoing Learning

Last season saw the launch of a new in person session delivered locally which aims to give real world experience to compliment the online learning undertaken on the Introduction to Coaching Football qualification, helping new coaches build their confidence on pitch.

In addition, we have also run sessions looking at specific subjects such as ways to build confidence in players, as well as our annual Coaching Conference which offers a full day of insights from a number of highly experienced coach developers. Collectively 1,289 development hours were recorded by Hertfordshire coaches across the season.

Junior Coach Award

A new qualification launched this year by Hertfordshire FA for young people age 12-16 who are interested in becoming a football coach, combining a mixture of classroom and practical learning to inspire the next generation of volunteers in the grassroots game.

We know that many young people involved in grassroots football are keen to help others develop a love of the game and this course aims to give them an insight into what it takes to be a good coach and build their confidence to get involved at their clubs.

78

Young People completing
the Junior Coach
Award



Courses Completed by Hertfordshire Coaches in 2023/24

775

Introduction to
Coaching Football

84

UEFA C

9

UEFA B

23

Other National
Courses

Referees

Central to every match

Match officials are critically important to our game. In all levels of competitive football, there is no game without them and unless we maintain a strong pipeline of referees coming into the game, the potential to grow participation will be severely limited.

While the journey starts with The FA Referee Course, our support for match officials continues throughout their career, from advice and guidance on dealing with challenging incidents through to progressing up the promotion ladder towards the elite levels.

Increasing Representation

Ensuring everyone has the chance to get involved in all areas of the game is at the heart of our work as a County FA. As participation across the game continues to grow, we want to ensure the referee workforce is reflective of the wider football community and this year we are proud to have more than 100 female referees registered for the first time.

In addition to running female only referee courses, we have also delivered a dedicated Women and Girls Refereeing event which contained content from The FA's National Development Manager and a professional female match official aimed at showcasing the potential opportunities for female referees to develop within the game.

"We are passionate about producing, supporting and retaining the next generation of match officials, who are absolutely crucial for the future of the grassroots game in our county"

Joe Karram, Football Development Officer (Referees)

Yellow Armbands for Under 18s

As part of our support to the next generation of match officials, we now provide yellow armbands to all registered referees in the county under the age of 18. When worn during matches these armbands clearly signify to coaches, players and spectators that these referees are still children and should be treated accordingly.

Too many young referees leave the game because of negative experiences in these early years. We hope that people will see these armbands at games and behave appropriately, understanding that young referees, just like young players, are learning the game and need support and encouragement so that they can develop and improve.



100

Female Referees in Hertfordshire for the first time

Hertfordshire Match Officials in 2023-24

1,262

Total Referees registered

311

New Referees recruited

35

Referees promoted

Football Foundation
funding for pitches in
Hertfordshire in 2023-24

£3.8m

Investment
into new 3G Pitches

£575k

Investment through the Grass
Pitch Maintenance Fund

214

Grass Pitches ranked
'Good' or 'Advanced'
on PitchPower



4

New 3G pitches opened
in Hertfordshire in
2023-24

Katherine Warrington School
Kings Langley School
Harpenden Town FC
Longdean School

Facilities

Creating better places to play

We work to increase the quality and quantity of pitches and facilities across the county, to help meet growing demand and improve the playing experience for everyone. Our role is to support facilities projects by guiding clubs through the process, helping them to access the funding opportunities that are available.

Working in partnership with Local Authorities, the Football Foundation, Sport England and other organisations, we recognise the importance of high-quality facilities and strive to deliver these for local communities.

The stock of 3G pitches available for use for training and competitive fixtures in the county continues to grow rapidly, with new facilities being added alongside efforts to ensure older artificial pitches are maintained to the required standard.

Grass Pitch Improvements

An inspection at Letchworth Garden City Eagles in 2021 graded 10 of the 11 pitches on site as basic or poor, with many games being lost to bad weather each season. We worked with the club to develop a plan for improving the pitches and increase playing capacity at their venue, helping them secure £135,000 investment from the Football Foundation.

Supported with expert help and new equipment, work was undertaken over several seasons and a subsequent inspection in 2023 showed the situation had improved considerably, with 10 of the 11 pitches graded as good or advanced. This has helped the club offer more opportunities growing from 30 teams to 49 (including 10 new girls teams) over this period.

The club's Grounds Keeper has since become a Pitch Adviser for Hertfordshire FA, helping other clubs to follow in their footsteps and deliver better pitches at their sites.

"With the support of Hertfordshire FA, the Football Foundation and expert advice from the GMA our pitches have been transformed over the last few years. I'm excited to be able to share my knowledge and experience with other clubs so that they can do the same"

Ian Crawley, Letchworth Garden City Eagles Grounds Keeper



Safeguarding

Ensuring everyone can Play Safe

Ensuring the safety of young people and vulnerable adults in football is a fundamental aspect of our role as governing body, but it is something that we cannot do alone. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and we all have a role to play.

The ongoing work to make the game as safe and enjoyable as possible is based on three main pillars, carrying out background checks on those in certain roles, raising awareness through education and training, and making it easy for everyone to report concerns.

While the perception is often that it 'couldn't happen here', the reality is that we dealt with 35 serious safeguarding cases in the last year alone. This highlights why it's vital for everyone to remain vigilant and follow best practice to help prevent the risk of harm.



"Safeguarding in football is not just qualifications and DBS checks. It's vital that everyone knows how they can play their part in keeping it safe"

Gemma Chaffey, Designated Safeguarding Manager

Validation Visits

Each season our staff go out and check that clubs are meeting their commitment to Safeguarding by ensuring that all those whose roles involve regular contact with young people are appropriately qualified for the role they are carrying out.

They make unannounced visits to training sessions and matches across a wide sample of clubs, during which coaches, parents and officials will be asked questions to ensure that everyone understands The FA processes for Safeguarding in football.

Prevent Partnership

The Prevent Strategy aims to reduce the threat to the UK by stopping people becoming drawn into supporting terrorism. Safeguarding vulnerable people from radicalisation is no different from safeguarding them from other forms of harm.

In partnership with Hertfordshire County Council we have offered special training to clubs and leagues, raising awareness across the game about the risk of radicalisation to young people, including how to recognise the signs and report concerns.

Based on those clubs that have received Prevent training to date, we can estimate that over 25,000 youth players have been covered by this initiative, helping to ensure safer communities across the county.



Keeping Hertfordshire Football Safe in 2023-24

143

Teams receiving a Validation Visit

35

Serious Safeguarding cases dealt with

20

Individuals suspended for not having a current DBS



County Cups

The magic of the cup

Our cup competitions provide an opportunity for local clubs to test their skills against opposition from across the county and experience the excitement of knockout football, where the unexpected can always happen.

This year saw a new Women's Trophy added, giving teams from lower down the ladder the chance to strive for Cup glory. This follows the addition of an Under 18 Girls competition in 2023, reflecting the growing depth of female football in the county and the increasing numbers transitioning from the youth to the adult game.

It also marked the return of both the Charity Shield and Charity Cup for the first time since before the pandemic. These have long been an opportunity for the football community in the county to come together and raise funds for worthy local causes, continuing a tradition that dates back to the start of last century.

Finals are showpiece events that create special memories for players, coaches and spectators alike. Each year we see great drama, from late winners to nail biting penalty shoot outs and this year was no exception.

"When welcoming teams to our County Cup finals, we try our best to make the occasion as special as possible for all involved. We know that win or lose these moments make memories that will last a lifetime"

Paddy Donovan, Hertfordshire FA Competitions Secretary

Hertfordshire FA Cup Winners 2024

Under 14 Boys: Sun Sports Youth

Under 15 Boys: St Albans City Youth

Under 16 Boys: Sun Sports Youth

Under 18 Boys: Cheshunt Youth

Under 14 Girls: Hertford Town Girls

Under 15 Girls: Hitchin Belles Youth

Under 16 Girls: Stevenage Starlets

Under 18 Girls: Oaklands Wolves

Sunday Junior: Northaw Reserves

Sunday Intermediate: Brewster Plumbing

Sunday Senior: Strafford Arms

Women's Trophy: Stevenage FC Development

Women's Senior Cup: Royston Town

Charity Shield: Tring Athletic

Charity Cup: St Albans City

Senior Centenary Trophy: Hoddesdon Town

Junior Cup: Sarrat Reserves

Intermediate Cup: St Albans City Reserves

Senior Cup: St Albans City

Administration

Keeping the ball in play

Ensuring an effective and efficient service to our customers is the key goal of our Operations team. From administration to communications, our aim is to keep the framework that supports grassroots football running smoothly so everyone can enjoy the game.

In the last year we have diversified our workforce through the recruitment of three new Degree Apprentices, allowing us to extend the services provided by our staff team, while helping foster the next generation to build a career in sports administration.

Affiliation

The 2023-24 season introduced a new approach to affiliation, with an updated online platform streamlining the administration process. This new portal was designed make it easier for Club Secretaries, while providing them with more information and control.

With a total 3,377 teams affiliated to Hertfordshire, it was a significant achievement for 93.5% of them to be able to complete the process without any intervention from our staff. This is a clear indication the new system was simpler and easier to use for the volunteer workforce.

Our aim is always to reduce the administrative burden and time spent by the volunteers who deliver grassroots football in Hertfordshire and we continue to review all our processes as we strive to achieve the Customer Service Excellence benchmark.



Discipline

One of our key objectives is to ensure everyone who goes through the discipline framework is treated fairly and fully understands the process. Across the last 12 months, we have worked hard to become more approachable, transparent and supportive for everyone involved.

Providing training to help improve the accuracy of what is being reported as well as explaining what happens during the course of an investigation and hearing all combine to build confidence in the validity of the decisions made.

Ensuring a swift process ensures the evidence provided is more credible and accurately remembered by everyone involved. We will continue to strive for ways to increase our efficiency in this area to minimise the timeline for each case.

"We pride ourselves on providing a robust and fair discipline process to everyone. We will continue to work hard to eradicate poor behaviour by implementing appropriate sanctions but also providing education for all"

Rob Smith, Hertfordshire FA Deputy CEO



Discipline Cases
in 2023-24

8,882
Cautions

788
Red Cards

306
Misconduct Charges

40
Personal Hearings

5
Appeals

Governance

Making the game fit for the future

We strive to be an effective modern organisation with the structures and processes in place to offer the best possible service to the game at a local level. One aspect of this is working towards The FA's Code of Governance, and in doing so showing that our organisation is run to the highest standards of corporate governance.

The code helps County FAs ensure their Boards and other decision-making structures are best equipped to deliver, safeguard and develop our National Game, introducing greater diversity of thinking in leadership, enhancing internal controls, processes and stronger risk management as well as improving the culture of the organisation.

"The Youth Council have led numerous projects, such as a youth referee survey, and an exciting team project aimed at improving sideline behaviour. I am looking forward to next season, where the Youth Council will make even more of an impact"

Madeline Hurley, Hertfordshire FA Youth Council Chair

3

New Independent Non Executive Directors Recruited

Equality Standard

The Equality Standard for Sport is a framework that assists sports organisations to widen access for under-represented individuals. It's built around developing both the organisation and it's services, and has four levels – Foundation, Preliminary, Intermediate and Advanced.

Having previously achieved the Foundation level in January 2023 we are proud to have progressed to achieving the Preliminary level this season. This a great effort on the part of our staff and Inclusion Advisory Group, reflecting our commitment to equality in all areas of our work.

Youth Council

Our Youth Council are a group of young leaders who aim to inspire, empower, and provide a voice for all young people to influence change, and positively impact football in Hertfordshire. If we are to build a bright future for football in our county, we need to ensure the voice of young players, coaches, referees and volunteers is reflected in our work.

Establishing the Youth Council during the summer of 2023 was the latest step in formalising the input of young people into our organisation and providing them with a platform to influence change. This underpins our efforts to promote greater equality and inclusion within the game, by ensuring that our governance and leadership is diverse and modern.

The County Ground

A football hub for the local community

This season marks five years since the home of Hertfordshire FA was transformed, with the installation of a state-of-the-art 3G pitch and significant improvements to the Community Football Centre thanks to funding from the Football Foundation.

Completed in early 2019, the project transformed the County Ground into a high quality, modern facility enabling it to be used more frequently and for a wider range of purposes than before, becoming a real community hub.

Local grassroots clubs use the pitch for training throughout the winter and it also hosts regular recreational activity aimed at older players, including weekly Walking Football sessions. The site has also been the home ground for several local teams, including Stevenage FC Women whose sides can be found here most weekends.

Through much of the year the pitch and various training rooms around the site are used by Stevenage FC for their Elite Development Programme, where participants study towards their BTEC Level 2 and 3 in Sport. Out of term time the Stevenage FC Foundation use the facilities for hosting their regular school holiday football camps.

The site continues to be used for the majority of our County Cup finals, as well as hosting courses and CPD events for Coaches and Referees. In addition, the facility is often used by other parts of the community outside of football, being home to weekly yoga sessions and taking bookings for events such as children's birthday parties.

The development of The County Ground has allowed us to diversify our offer and maximise usage of our site. This provides an additional source of income that we can use to support the development of the grassroots game.



"Developing the County Ground has been of a huge benefit to our organisation over the past five years, enabling us to become home to a much wider range of activities and demonstrating first hand how much these kinds of facilities can offer their local communities"

Steve Maker, Hertfordshire FA Head of Football Development and Investment



Grassroots Awards

Celebrating inspirational volunteers

These Awards enable us to recognise and celebrate the fantastic people who put their heart and soul into the grassroots game in Hertfordshire

Grassroots is powered by people who make a positive difference, working hard to show the true power of football in connecting people, in building communities and enabling more players to enjoy playing the beautiful game.

The winners of our Grassroots Football Awards were selected from a public nominations process across a range of different categories. We thank everyone for making nominations and every nominee for their remarkable efforts.

Our inspirational winners are all grassroots heroes and the list includes individuals and organisations working hard to bring football to everyone in their communities.

"Congratulations to our award winners and a huge thank you to all of the grassroots heroes throughout Hertfordshire whose incredible efforts make football happen. We hear so many inspirational stories through the nomination process it makes us proud to be part of such an amazing community"

Karl Lingham, Hertfordshire FA CEO

Hertfordshire Award Winners 2024

- Grounds Team of the Year**
Graham O'Brien
- Young Volunteer of the Year:**
George Barber
- Coach of the Year Female Pathway**
Sam Cushion
- Coach of the Year Disability Pathway**
David Gower
- Coach of the Year Male Pathway**
Ryan Ellis
- Match Official of the Year**
Ruby Lyne
- New Volunteer of the Year**
Piers Hudson
- League of the Year**
Royston Crow Youth Football League
- Club of the Year**
Chipperfield Corinthians Youth
- Keeping Football Positive**
Marc Willmore
- Lioness Award**
Herts Women's Walking Football League
- Bobby Moore Award**
Steve Dyett

Our Partners

Working together to achieve shared goals

From the countless volunteers who keep the game going across grassroots, to local and national organisations who share a common purpose, it's a real team effort. We are proud to have close relationships with our partners and working together we can maximise the positive impact of football on our communities.



Key Measures

Delivering for grassroots football in Hertfordshire

Comparing grassroots football at the end of the 2023-24 season to the position three years ago at the start of our last strategy



Hertfordshire FA

The County Ground
Baldock Road
Letchworth
Hertfordshire
SG6 2EN

01462 677622

contactus@hertfordshirefa.com

@HertfordshireFA