



# Sustainability at The Ashes

Russell Seymour, sustainability manager at Lord's, talks about 'reduce, reuse and recycle' at sports venues and getting people to think strategically about sustainability issues, while sharing best practice



By: Russell Seymour

**T**he Ashes is one of sport's most well-known, well-loved and enduring competitions. It is 136 years since England and Australia first played each other in Test match cricket and this summer will see a five-match series start at Trent Bridge on 10 July with matches at Lord's, Old Trafford and

Emirates Durham before the series finale at the Oval in August. But while others are watching the cricket I shall spend my days rummaging in bins, tracking energy use and thinking about composting the grass clippings that are taken off of the outfield each morning before play.

As an industry, sport has lagged behind

other walks of life in embracing 'greener' alternatives to the way we do things, and yet our impacts are significant and our opportunity to influence profound. Effectively 'sustainable sport' is about delivering high-quality opportunities to engage with and participate in sport, at all levels, in a more efficient and inclusive way.



**British Association for Sustainable Sport**

In 2010, I initiated a series of meetings which led to the formation and launch, in October 2011, of BASIS, the British Association for Sustainable Sport. The BASIS Steering Group has members from a variety of sports including cricket, football, golf, horse racing, rugby union and tennis with involvement from governing bodies, clubs and venues. Grassroots sport is strongly represented alongside professional sport.

The founding principles of BASIS are to get people in sport thinking strategically about sustainability issues and talking to each other to discover and share best practice before taking action and educating their staff and fans.

No matter what the size the club or venue, no matter which sport and regardless of the level of play we must deliver the self improvement and social cohesion that only sport can offer. Whether it is the village cricket club or Lord's ground, we each pay energy bills, water and tend our pitches, supply food to players and spectators and get rid of waste, among other things, and the challenges faced are the same, maybe just on a different scale.

There are no absolutes in sustainability. It is rare that any activities can be considered completely "sustainable" because there are always

trade-offs between different impacts. Actions can be better or worse and the outcome always depends on the context. For this reason, acting more sustainably requires joined-up thinking from the start and throughout the whole process.

**Reduce, reuse, recycle**

Using waste as an example, the Waste Regulations (2011) now makes it a legal requirement to implement this 'waste hierarchy'. The ultimate repository for all waste is the environment, whether disposal be via landfill or by incineration all waste will be broken down by natural systems.

The problem we have now is that some of our materials are so resilient that they take years, decades, centuries or, in many extreme cases, even millennia to break down. This is also true of chemical compounds, such as fertilisers and pesticides that we use in agriculture and on our sports fields. Nature has no biochemical processes to break down our novel compounds so it requires the slower actions of physical processes to break them down.

We can reduce the impact of our waste by thinking through the life cycle of a thing before you buy it, whether it is a significant piece of machinery for ground preparation and maintenance or the single use cup being used by customers that is then thrown away.

“ Acting more sustainably requires joined-up thinking from the start and throughout the whole process ”

**Olympic standards**

This time last year, the eyes of the world focused on Great Britain for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The environment was introduced into the Olympic Charter as the third pillar of Olympism (alongside sport and culture) back in 1994 but the London Games took this concept further by including sustainability from the start of planning to become "the sustainable Games". The work done by the sustainability team of the London Games has set a benchmark of performance that all sport, at all levels, can, and should, meet.



*The environmental challenges at Lord's are mirrored at other venues*



The first question is always “do we really need it?” If you can accomplish what you need to do without purchasing more ‘stuff’, then it makes sense not to buy it, both economically and in terms of resource use. If you do need it do you have to buy it or can you borrow or hire? Equipment often sits idle; can better planning mean that equipment can be shared and once you have used it you pass it on to someone else to use? If you do purchase your own equipment understanding from the start how you will dispose of it is key.

Waste has been described as “something you pay for once to buy and pay for again to dispose of”. Some thought at the point of purchase may reduce future costs. Certainly there are strong financial pressures to divert away from landfill, with per tonne gate fees currently at £72 and increasing by £8 each year for the foreseeable future. Diversion of waste from landfill reduces the pressure on facilities that are rapidly filling up. Incineration, with energy recovery substitutes waste for fossil fuels effectively reducing fossil carbon emissions, but

there are still issues with this technology including emissions of complex organic molecules and greenhouse gases. The most sustainable route is always to reduce waste in the first place.

#### Sustainability at Lord’s

At Lord’s, management of waste is probably our most significant issue on major match days. Over the course of a Test match we may see more than 120,000 spectators passing through our gates. With the opportunity to stay in the ground for up to 10 hours on each day catering for the needs of these people will see us dispose of more than 100 tonnes of waste over the course of the match.

We manage three separate, high-volume waste streams; glass is collected separately and staff and spectators are asked to separate their recyclable and general waste (food is mixed with the general waste stream). We have sent no waste directly to landfill for the last four seasons as our general waste is incinerated with energy recovery. In recent years we

have plateaued at recycling around one-third of our waste; sometimes it is better and sometimes it is worse depending mainly on operational issues (the recycling compactor broke down on one occasion).

The nature of Test match cricket means that we have to have the ground cleaned, prepared and ready to continue playing the next day and, being in a residential area of London, our ability to work into the evening is understandably curtailed. Some venues that have more time to work on their waste management have been able to claim recycling rates in excess of 80 and even 90 per cent, some are even starting to sell segregated waste to recyclers, turning a cost into a financial return.

To lift our recycling rates we have worked hard to ensure that most (not quite all) of the packaging and other materials that we give out on match days are recyclable, so simplifying the need for the public to make a decision when faced with three colour-coded bins. We are continuing to look at new



*At Lord's waste management on match days is a major issue*

innovations to reduce the amount of waste generated and to improve our recycling rates.

Clearly sport, and especially professional sport, is competitive in nature. However, at its root it is participation, inclusion and self-improvement. Similarly, sustainability is about empowering individuals to work more efficiently towards a common goal, specifically a cleaner environment and a fairer society with opportunities for all. Advances and progress in sustainable practices are not usually business sensitive and can be shared. Innovations from large venues can be taken up by smaller clubs and there have been instances where grass roots clubs have shown the way to the professional game.

Next year Lord's celebrates the bicentenary of being on the same site in St John's Wood, London. Many things have changed in those two centuries and, if predictions are to be believed, the next 200 years will bring more significant changes to the environment. The way we act now may

influence the extent of those changes in the future. Managing sustainably takes a long term view, so I wonder what things will be like at Lord's in another 200 years? What I can say is

that, with attitudes changing so quickly, the way we manage sustainability will change significantly in the two years before the Australians return for another home Ashes series. ●



*Cricket is striking a blow for sustainability in sport*