



# NORFOLK COUNTY FA ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

UNITING NORFOLK FOOTBALL

## ANNUAL REPORT

### Chairman's Review

#### MY REPORT THIS YEAR WILL BE AROUND CHANGE

Firstly, let me touch on why we have moved the AGM to where we are now. The main reason is that when we hold the AGM in June / July we are always signing off the previous year's set of accounts which doesn't make sense, so I had the backing of the board to move it later in the year to now, so we can sign off the current season's set. So, tonight we will be signing off 22/23 and 23/24 accounts to get us on track moving forward.

As always within my annual report, this being my 11th, it gives me opportunities to thank numerous people. Another year has flown by within Norfolk FA and again it has been an exceptionally busy year. I would like to start my report with firstly thanking all the staff who have gone above and beyond their normal workload to make football thrive in the County. it hasn't been the easiest of years, but they have all performed impeccably.

Our CEO Matt Carpenter, a stick of rock, cut him in half and Norfolk FA is embedded within his core. His work effort is non-stop although, in a small way he is beginning to listen to me and taking some time off, not sending out emails in the evening etc. I'm sure he is still learning every day and our phone calls are never quick, always lots to catch up on! On behalf of the Board i would like to thank you Matt for your due diligence in everything you do for Norfolk football.



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John Turner, our legal director and Senior Independent Director, stood down from the Board in July. Personally, I would like to thank John for his support throughout his time on the Board together with working alongside him on the Central & South Norfolk League. John has dedicated the majority of his life to grassroots football with over 50 years' service to the league and over 25 years supporting Norfolk FA as a Council Member and Board Director.

I'm pleased to say I offered Paul Marshall our Finance Director the position as our new Senior Independent Director and this was fully supported by the Board. Paul has been Board Member for 5 years, with a background in accountancy and has been big help to Matt and Lynnette throughout this time and a big asset to the Board.

The Board is now made up of the following

- Michael Banham – Chair
- Matt Carpenter – Company Secretary – Executive
- Paul Ballard – Insurance & Risk
- Paul Marshall – Finance
- Joe Conway – Commercial
- Stacey Annison – Sustainability
- Kathryn Hirst – Legal
- Tobi Amadasun – Inclusion
- Ashley Judd – HR & Wellbeing
- Matt Wells – Safeguarding



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I would like to thank Matt Wells, who has been our Safeguarding Director for the last five years. Matt will be standing down in January due to family, work and football commitments with England u16's. Matt has been a huge help for the Board with successfully seeing us through the last three safeguarding audits. I would like to thank each of you for the support you have shown myself and the commitment and time you have given to the Board and Norfolk football especially as volunteers.

Only last week we launched our new strategy "Uniting Norfolk football" for the next four years. We have set out clear ambitions in the directions for the future of football across Norfolk and Matt will be touching on this in more detail within his review.

Thank you to the Board, Matt, Ian, the Senior Leadership Team, the staff and to all those who attended the road shows we did around the county whose input was greatly appreciated.

Finally, before I pass onto Matt would like to recognise a member of staff who will be leaving us in December for a role within the FA. It is with a heavy heart we say goodbye to Ian Grange, but we certainly wish him well for the future. Ian will still be a big part of Norfolk as he will be supporting the facilities work of all fifty counties. Our loss, The FA's gain. One thing can be said, Norfolk FA seems to be the stepping stone to the FA. Ian's work commitment, as always, is unbelievable, and I would like to thank him for the work he has done to support local clubs but also his passion for the FDC's. Good luck Ian and keep in touch.

I'm pleased to say we have filled Ian's role with Michelle Stewart, presently head of the FDC's. Let's all wish Michelle the very best. Finally, thank you to you all, thank you for all the volunteers in Norfolk who make us a county worthy of playing football in.

Have a great 2024/25 season.

**Michael Banham**  
*Chairman*



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# *ANNUAL REPORT*

## Chief Executive's Review

Good evening. For my third annual report as CEO, I will spend the next few minutes providing a summary of the last 12 months of #NorfolkFootball before touching on what lies ahead.

I'm going to start this report in the same manner as last year by focusing on a core activity that runs through the heart of everything that we do, safeguarding. Pleasingly we once again passed our annual safeguarding assessment with flying colours. In this period, our DSO, Ken D'Rosario has gone from being part-time to full-time and that has proven to be a very positive move. We have continued to make use of The FA's shared safeguarding service and that has enabled us to achieve very high levels of compliance and we have also worked hard on the introduction of safeguarding into Open Aged football with managers / coaches and so forth now requiring an in date FA DBS and also to have completed the FA's Player Welfare Course.

Although we will not have a safeguarding assessment in 24/25 we will continue to ensure that we maintain the same high standards that we have set ourselves, ensuring that safeguarding remains at the heart of everything that we do.

Alongside safeguarding, inclusion also remains a core activity for us and back in the summer of this year, we launched our first ever Diversity Inclusion Action Plan. The plan runs alongside our new strategy which the Chairman has already mentioned and I will come back to shortly and is designed to focus on key areas of participation in football from players to coaches to referees and only this week our Football Delivery Officers for Volunteering & Coaching and Referee Development has been working with a local organisation, Soul Church, to provide training to individuals who are from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds as we look to make Norfolk Football truly a sport for all.



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Supported by Anoushka Williamson, our Football Delivery Officer (Disability), we have achieved real growth in the disability game in Norfolk over the past 12 months, with a number of Clubs including Norwich Community Sports Foundation, King's Lynn Community Football, King's Lynn Town FC, Heacham FC, Horsford FC, Hopton Harriers FC and Mulbarton FC offering a disability provision for people in their local area.

We have also have a Disability Football Ambassador in place to allow us to continue this growth over the next 12 months.

A third core foundation of how we work is around Governance and I am pleased to be able to confirm that we achieved the latest iteration of the FA's Code of Governance standard in June 2024. The code represents a kite mark for governance and demonstrates that we are running our organisation to the standards that are required and you would expect of us.

Our task for the coming seasons is to help support these governance standards being rolled out to our Clubs and Leagues, where a lot of really good work already takes place.

So far I have spoken around matters off the pitch, but now I will turn my attentions to matters on the field of play and my congratulations go to all the teams across Norfolk who were successful in winning league titles, league and County Cups in 2023/24.

Once again our County Cups proved to be the highlight of the season for so many. Whilst we were only able to host two finals at Carrow Road last season, both were fantastic occasions for all involved and especially the Norfolk Hire Senior Cup which saw Downham Town beat favourites Gorleston 4-2 in a thoroughly entertaining game witnessed by a crowd of 715. The Harrod Sports Women's Final took place the day before and Norwich City retained the cup, comfortably beating Wroxham in front of the largest attendance of the season with 922 fans at Carrow Road.



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Away from Carrow Road, for the first time in many years the Junior Cup Final was hosted by a local club as we headed to Dereham Town, where Watlington Sports & Social Club beat Dersingham Rovers 1-0. Sadly that match was marred by a significant act of violence that resulted in a very serious injury being sustained by one of the spectators.

Sadly spectator behaviour in general across our Cup Finals fell below the standards of the past, with our staff all too often being the targets of unpleasant and completely unwarranted abuse and we will be taking whatever steps we can to look to avoid a repeat of that at the end of this season.

In more positive news, for the first time ever we held three girls County Cup competitions, at U12's, U14's and U16's, with Gorleston FC, Wymondham Town United FC and Costessey Sports FC picking up the respective trophies. Run as a pilot last season, all three competitions were a real success and are now part of the County Cup structure and I'm sure will be for years to come.

Cup finals aren't just about the two competing clubs of course as there is a third team on the pitch, and my congratulations go to the 56 match officials who were rewarded with a well-deserved County Cup Final appointment this season. The appointment policy for Cup Finals continued to ensure that it wasn't just referees who were up for promotion who got to take to the pitch for these prestigious occasions.

Continuing with refereeing, our Referee Development Officer, Harvey Newstead, once again managed to have great success against the Key Performance Indicators that we are measured against with all bar one of the targets being exceeded. 148 new referees were recruited against a target of 113. 29 referees were promoted over the course of the season against a target of 17, whilst 106 referees were converted against a target of 89.

The one target that was missed was retention with 344 referees from the previous season re-registering against a target of 360, so we only just missed that one.



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Of course refereeing is not just about getting people onto a course and registered, it is about making sure that they actually get out onto the pitch to referee games and thanks to the hard work of our now full-time Referee Appointments Officer Ryan Starkey, our coverage numbers were 96.7% on Saturdays and 97.3% on Sundays, giving an overall coverage of 97%, up 2% on the previous season and once again comfortably exceeding our 90% target, although we would of course love to hit 100% on both days.

I will now turn my attention to our Regulatory Services team. Sadly the 2023/24 season has seen another increase in the number of disciplinary offences dealt with by the team, as behaviour in local football seems to continue to get worse, although the positive news is that the rate of increase has dropped.

In 2023/24 cautions and send offs were both up, with 7,199 yellow cards and 588 red cards shown compared to 6,817 and 582 the previous season.

After a dramatic increase in the number of misconduct charges in 2022/23, this number plateaued somewhat with 342 cases compared to 346 the year before. Both numbers are well up on the 211 charges in 2022/23 though, so there is still a lot of work to do in this area and more on this when I talk about our new strategy.

Moving away from discipline and on to player numbers, it is pleasing to be able to report that all of our KPI's were exceeded. In male participation, we had 25,231 participants against a target of 23,194, in female participation the numbers were 4,365 compared to 3,268 and in disability we have 409 participants, narrowly exceeded the target of 395. All excellent figures and testament to the hard work undertaken by our Football Development Team.



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As well as achieving those KPIs we also saw positive figures in our statistics relating to coaching, with 1,263 CPD instances against a target of 603 and our Youth Teams with a Qualified Coach target being exceeded by 13.5%. A large part of the credit for this goes to James Buhlemann whose work around the Norfolk FA Coaches club continues to go from strength to strength. As well as running a hugely successful tour last year that saw 24 coaches head to the North West of the country, membership of the Club continues to grow and at the time of writing stands at 912, of whom 81 are female. Our coach development work has attracted national interest as we are shortlisted in the Coach Development category of the 2024 County FA Recognition Awards with the awards ceremony taking place later this week.

That is one of three projects that we have nominated, as we are also shortlisted in the Football Development category for our work around our new Supervets League that we launched during the 2023/24 season. This is a brand new provision for male players who felt veterans football was too fast paced, but wanted a competitive provision that was not walking football and by the end of the 2023/24 season 83 players were registered to take part. A similar provision was also put in place for women, with 42 unique players registering for the league, which in this case was for players aged 30+.

Our final shortlisting is in the category of Special Recognition and relates to a joint initiative between Norfolk FA, the Big C, who are a cancer charity) AND Norwich City Community Sports Foundations and delivers a regular walking football provision for people suffering from, or affected by, cancer. Hopefully at least one of our projects will be a national winner, but even if they are not, we are still very proud of all three. The activities I have mentioned so far are just a small part of the work undertaken by the Football Development team.

Their work also links very closely with our facilities team and this area of work is led by our Deputy CEO Ian Grange. This area of the business sees demand for new and better facilities continue to grow exponentially and as we reached the end of our 21/24 strategy, we had achieved our £6m capital investment target. In 2023/24 this included the opening of an impressive new 3G pitch at Aylsham FC.



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**We are of course fortunate as a County FA to have our own facilities, which help underpin the work that we do to support the game**

**The main one of these is The FDC and 2023/24 has been a very successful twelve months for our prestigious home site. Operating with 1 full size, 4 7v7 and 2 5v5 pitches there have been plenty of challenges along the way, under the leadership of both Ian Grange and our Head of FDCs, Michelle Stewart, we have delivered a service that we are proud of and the fact that so many Leagues host their Cup Finals at our venues, together with the vast number of teams that call the FDC home, is testimony to the work that they have all put in.**

**The jewel in the crown is undoubtedly the Harrod Sport Arena, which continues to regularly receive praise from everyone who uses it and hosts as many as 6 matches each weekend.**

**The FDC also recently hosted a hugely successful Harrod Sports Women's & Girls Tournament and our annual FDC Youth Cup. Both events continue to go from strength to strength and the feedback from this year's events was once again overwhelmingly positive.**

**The FDC @ Open has also enjoyed a successful year and the completion of a new second pitch at the site earlier in the year has seen it go from strength to strength, with demand continuing to exceed supply at many of the prime booking times.**

**There is no denying that the current climate continues to make operating facilities more challenging than it has even been and so we will continue to look for new and innovative ways to make sure that we are getting the very best from the facilities that we can.**



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**2023/24 has been a challenging year for the Association but also a very successful one both on and off the pitch. The new season sees us move into our new strategy period as mentioned earlier by the Chairman and as part of that we went through a very difficult restructuring period towards the end of the last season as we looked to align the roles that we have in the Association with our new strategy and then saw Matt Lemmon, Dan Bird and Anna Larkins all leave us and we thank them for all of their hard work and commitment over the years.**

**As Michael has mentioned, Ian Grange will also be leaving us soon as he takes up an exciting opportunity with The FA and their gain is definitely our loss and he leaves with our very best wishes.**

**The new strategy, Uniting Norfolk Football will see us align with The FA in having 5 strategic priorities:**

- **Improve player choice & opportunities**
- **Deliver equal opportunities for women & girls to play**
- **Build more & improve existing facilities**
- **Tackle poor behaviour**
- **Develop a valued network of volunteers, coaches and referees**

**And 3 strategic drivers:**

- **Supporting thriving community clubs**
- **Connect & serve participants**
- **Progress the games governance**

**These will be underpinned by our 6 strategic foundations:**

- **Safeguarding Norfolk Football**
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
- **Robust governance and financial stability**
- **Marketing, communication & partnerships**
- **Customer excellence**
- **Environmental sustainability**

**And finally we will have 4 strategic values that will shape everything that we do:**

- **Engage**
- **Inspire**
- **Evolve**
- **Unify**

**A copy of our full new strategy is available on our website. We no doubt have an exciting four years ahead.**







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I think this report has already highlighted the amazing amount of activity that Norfolk FA have undertaken in the past twelve months and to be honest I have only really scratched the surface of what we do!

Of course, none of this would be possible to achieve without the help of others and Michael has already thanked many of those involved in his welcome speech, so I will just add personal thanks to all of our partners whose support is so very important to us.

I will now move to our incredible grassroots volunteer workforce, without whom quite simply there would be no football. As I know from experience, volunteering can be a relentless and thankless task at times, in fact most of the time, but ultimately it is a hugely rewarding thing to do so thank you to everyone that gives up their time to make football possible. Every year we get to recognise a small selection of the volunteer workforce at our annual awards dinner and details of who they were this year can be found on our website.

Like in my first two reports it has been a twelve month period of lots of highs and a few lows but overall I am hugely proud of everything that we have been able to achieve. And the key word there is of course we, as everything we do is very much a team effort and no one part could function without all the others. So my next thank you goes to our Board and in particular our Chairman Michael Banham, for the continued support and guidance that they provide.

My final thanks go to each and everyone of our team here at Norfolk FA for the incredible dedication, commitment and service that they show grassroots football and also to me in my role as CEO – it's a privilege I will never take for granted.

2024/25 sees us move into year 1 of our new strategy and I have no doubt that football will continue to evolve in the years to come and we have the opportunity over the next twelve months to ensure that Norfolk FA can continue to lead our national sport in the county.

Thank you.

**Matt Carpenter**  
*Chief Executive*

Presented at the Annual General Meeting, Monday 4 November 2024



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