



Football and the city

Liverpool's Premier League clubs as economic, cultural and social anchors

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Key takeaways

1. Liverpool's two Premier League clubs are not only global sporting brands but also integral to the city's cultural identity and local economy. Their contribution to the regional economy is significant, supporting thousands of jobs and generating billions in economic value.
2. Stadium developments provide particular opportunities for football clubs to bring tangible benefits to local economies. Everton's new Hill Dickinson Stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock, for example, has provided a unique opportunity to regenerate a previously neglected part of the city.
3. Like many other Premier League clubs, both Liverpool and Everton are internationally owned, but their deep-rooted local identities are crucial to their brand. Both clubs are anchor institutions in the city, delivering extensive social value, including through community initiatives.
4. While the introduction of the Independent Football Regulator marks a welcome step in bringing fans and communities better protection for their clubs, more can be done to harness the local economic and social benefits of football, particularly at Premier League level.
5. Realising the full potential of football-driven economic development requires continued collaboration between football clubs and public authorities. As developments in Liverpool demonstrate, effective stewardship and alignment of club activities with local development goals are essential to ensuring benefits extend beyond the pitch to the wider community.

1. Introduction

2025 has been a significant year for football in the city of Liverpool. As the red side of the city celebrated its record-equalling 20th top-flight title, Everton moved into the new, state-of-the-art Hill Dickinson Stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock, marking the first steps in regeneration of a long-neglected part of the city. This year has also been noteworthy for women's football, with Everton Women making Goodison Park the largest permanent home for an English women's club and Liverpool Women now well-established in the WSL following their promotion back to the top tier in 2022.

Together, Liverpool's two Premier League clubs have a major cultural and economic imprint on the city. Reflecting the importance of football to the UK economy more widely, it is estimated that Premier

League football supports 33,000 jobs and contributes £3.3bn in Gross Value Added in the North West alone (EY, 2024).

Liverpool exemplifies the often complex relationship between elite clubs and their localities. On the one hand, Liverpool and Everton are major corporations and internationally recognisable brands. On the other, they are anchor institutions – deeply rooted in their communities, delivering a wide variety of community programmes and making a significant impact on the local economy through regeneration, in their role as major employers and via supply chains. Their cultural imprint is huge, from the stadia looming over the city to the ubiquitous replica shirts worn by residents and tourists alike.

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explores football's place in Liverpool, the role of clubs to act as anchor institutions and fulcrums for urban regeneration, and the opportunity to consider the wider local economic impacts of one of the UK's most high profile cultural products.

2. The cultural imprint of football in Liverpool

Football is central to Liverpool's self-image and civic identity. Its two Premier League clubs are global brands, arguably equal in stature to The Beatles in their contribution to developing perceptions of the city in recent decades. The globalisation of English football since the inception of the Premier League in 1992 has, however, created a paradox. Ownership of Premier League clubs is increasingly international, with 16 of the 20 Premier League clubs in the 2025/26 season under full or majority ownership by foreign investors. The bulk of club income is derived not from match-going supporters or spending on shirts and other merchandise, but from domestic and international broadcast revenues (Roberts et al., 2016). The Premier League's [estimated annual revenue of over £6bn and broadcast rights income of over £5bn dwarfs Europe's other top leagues](#). Yet a significant element of its international popularity is based on the close connection between clubs and their localities. Indeed, as some have argued, "[the Premier League is global because it is local](#)".

Recent years have seen this tension increasingly come to the fore. Concerns have been raised by supporters about extractive ownership models and sponsorship deals, particularly links with the online gambling firms that have dominated Premier League shirt sponsorship in recent years (Auclair, 2021). In 2021, an attempt by Europe's richest clubs, including five from the Premier League, to establish a European Super League was abandoned after mass

protests from supporters. Similarly, attempts by Liverpool FC's owners in the late 2000s and early 2010s to move the club from its historic Anfield home to a new stadium in Stanley Park were aborted following fan opposition, including mobilisation by the newly established Liverpool Supporters Union (Southern, 2014). Everton's recent move to Bramley-Moore Dock came after failed plans for the club to move to a new stadium at Kirkby (widely opposed by Everton supporters) or Walton Hall Park (prompting objections from community and environmental activists). Even as Premier League football is increasingly commodified, globalised and financialised, the identity of elite clubs remains closely linked to the localities they represent, and reliant – culturally, if not financially – on their most engaged supporters (Evans and Norcliffe, 2016).

3. Football clubs as anchor institutions

The intense connection between professional football clubs and the communities they represent has led some to characterise clubs as 'anchor institutions'. As institutions geographically fixed to the city or town they represent (and in most cases are named after), Premier League clubs are distinctive as large, internationally recognised businesses with deep, immovable cultural roots. Defined as sites of 'sticky capital', anchor institutions – such as universities, hospitals and public sector organisations – make significant contributions to their local economies, as employers, purchasers of local services and managers of physical assets (CLES, 2019). For example, within the Liverpool City Region, the University of Liverpool is one of the largest anchor institutions, generating an estimated £1.2 billion Gross Value Added

(GVA) and over 15,000 local jobs in 2022/23 (UoL, 2024).

Attempts to measure the social value of football clubs have largely focused on the work of Football Club Charities (FCCs). The reach of the programmes delivered by FCCs is extensive, with the Premier League reporting that 2.5 million people have benefited from community programmes operated by its clubs. Liverpool and Everton both have long-established community programmes with significant impacts across Liverpool City Region. Liverpool FC's most recent accounts report an estimated social value of £90m delivered by its official charity the LFC Foundation, a return of £13.70 for every £1 spent (LFC, 2025), with programmes combining sports and wellbeing activities with education and health objectives. The Everton in the Community (EITC) programme has been operational since 1988 and currently runs over 60 initiatives focused on tackling poor physical and mental health, improving educational outcomes and improving employment opportunities (EFC, 2024), generating £29.86 of social value for every £1 invested (ibid).

Case study 1. The [Trinity Project](#). Everton's five-year community strategy, directly engages over 30,000 participants every year. This includes programmes such as [EITC Learns](#) (supporting young people in areas of deprivation with career advice and training), [EITC Minds](#) (providing mental health services including crisis support across North Liverpool) and [EITC Thrives](#) (addressing anti-social behaviour and empowering communities through football).

The social value of Premier League clubs goes beyond FCC initiatives, however. A report by Supporters Direct (a predecessor

to the [Football Supporters' Association](#)) emphasised the need to differentiate between the direct social value provided by the community schemes operated by the majority of professional clubs, and the "overall operation of the club as a local institution and its positive and negative impacts" (Substance, 2010: 3). A [recent Premier League report](#) found its clubs supported over 90,000 jobs in the 2021/22 season, many in the supply chain. Both Liverpool clubs are accredited Living Wage Employers, committing them to paying all employees the 'real' living wage set by the [Living Wage Foundation](#) and based on the cost of living. However, a [2019 report by Common Wealth](#) raised concerns about the pay and working conditions of employees working indirectly for Premier League clubs, particularly through security firms and catering companies.

Case study 2. The [LFC Foundation](#) supported 127,000 people in the last 12 months with almost 60% of participants from the top 20% most deprived neighbourhoods. This included 195 separate football sessions a week across 199 schools, alongside the [Red Neighbours](#) initiative, which supports community organisations operating in Anfield and other parts of North Liverpool.

Reflecting the growth of environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles in large businesses, many clubs have developed sustainable procurement policies. For example, [The Red Way](#), LFC's sustainability strategy, targets a reduction in plastic and aims to procure products from manufacturers aligned with the club's sustainable procurement code.

However, the ownership structures of most Premier League clubs may hinder closer

relationships with local economies. The majority are privately owned entities, and many have received significant investment from international capital, with concerns that as a result money generated through footballing activity is extracted rather than circulated into local economies (Common Wealth, 2019). By contrast, German clubs are subject to the '50+1' rule, meaning private investors can only ever hold a minority stake in any Bundesliga club, with majorities retained by club members. While direct comparisons on the local economic impact of clubs operating in different nations is not straightforward, there is some evidence that clubs under long-term fan ownership may prioritise local supply chains and regional partnerships (McKinsey & Co, 2025). The recent establishment of the [Independent Football Regulator](#) is a welcome step in providing supporters with more say over how their clubs are run, but there is currently little prospect of fan-ownership models taking root in the Premier League.

4. Football stadia and regeneration

Rarely is the connection between elite clubs and their local economies more apparent than in the enormous stadia that loom over North Liverpool. As [illustrated after the tragic death of Diogo Jota earlier this year](#), and in the response to [the shocking incident at Liverpool FC's title victory parade](#), football grounds serve as totems for fans and communities even outside matchdays. The opening of Everton's new Hill Dickinson Stadium meanwhile demonstrates the potential of football stadia to deliver significant local economic benefits. Its surrounding area, like much of North Liverpool, has long suffered from its detachment from more accessible parts of the redeveloped waterfront (Parkinson, 2021) and, from the outset, the stadium project was integrated into the planned Liverpool

Waters scheme – the Peel-led development project stretching from Prince's Dock to the new stadium described as the "largest single development opportunity in the city" (LCC, 2022: 35). There is [particular focus on linking the stadium and surrounding area to the city centre](#) and the stadium is [also central to plans for new homes and transport links](#).

Recent evidence of the benefits provided by football stadia can be seen following the expansion of the Anfield Road Stand in 2024, which brought the capacity of Liverpool's iconic stadium up to 61,000 and has enabled the club to hold more concerts and other non-football events at the ground, bringing increased revenue and employment opportunities. The [Homebaked Community Land Trust](#), based in Anfield, provides an example of how proximity to football stadia can bring tangible benefits to local communities. Established in 2012 after the local community worked together to save a much-loved and long-established pie shop from demolition, the trust is now harnessing the success of the reopened and rebranded bakery to [bring new life to the surrounding area](#) through retrofit programmes and plans for new, affordable and social housing.

New and redeveloped stadia are often heralded for their potential to spark regeneration. Yet recent history is littered with examples of stadium development projects which have failed to positively impact local economies, despite frequent large public subsidies (Bradbury et al., 2022). Evidence on the economic impact of new stadia in the UK is mixed. Research on the Principality Stadium in Cardiff for example found limited initial effects (Jones, 2002; Davies, 2008) but more positive impacts on employment over time (Sport Wales, 2019).

Transport connectivity and integration with local amenities is crucial to the success of new stadia, with positive economic impacts dependent on attracting retail, commercial and residential development (Barry et al., 2022). This model has had notable success at Wembley, where the stadium redevelopment was followed by the opening of new retail and leisure attractions including the BoxPark venue, albeit accompanied by an increase in property prices that have raised concerns about long-standing local businesses and residents being pushed out of the area (Ahlfeldt and Kavestosos, 2014). Manchester City's move to a new stadium in the east of the city was accompanied by a huge expansion of the Metrolink tram network (Davies, 2008), providing the impetus for development of a new sixth form academy, the Institute of Health and Performance and, most recently, the Co-op Live Arena.

The Hill Dickinson Stadium is expected to [attract 1.4 million visitors to the city every year, provide 15,000 additional jobs and generate £250m to local supply chains](#). However, these benefits are not inevitable. Ensuring the new stadium provides positive impacts for local businesses and residents will require careful stewardship over the coming years, with evidence suggesting progressive procurement policies focused on actively supporting local supply chains can be effective (McTier, 2020). Continuing engagement and leadership from Liverpool City Council and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority will be crucial in aligning local policy objectives with the direct economic benefits the new Everton stadium will bring.

5. Football and the city: a complex relationship

The Premier League's status as the world's most watched football league, and its openness to international ownership has resulted in a complex relationship between elite clubs and the communities they represent. Clubs not backed by large international investors increasingly struggle to compete with those financed by investment firms or sovereign wealth funds. Yet, clubs are reliant on the authenticity provided by local fans and the heritage in which they are steeped, even as supporter bases become ever more international.

As this briefing illustrates, the impact of Premier League clubs on local economies is significant. They are anchor institutions, delivering social value not only through their extensive community engagement but also in their role as major employers and contributors to local supply chains. The development of new stadia, such as Everton's new home at Bramley-Moore Dock, provides opportunities for policymakers to ensure the economic impact of Premier League wealth is realised locally. In the longer term, careful stewardship and partnership between local leaders and football club custodians will be required to bring further tangible benefits to local communities.

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