

# Greener Futures

## NO.10 THE KIT CRISIS

Next in our series, **Jo Harman-McGowan** looks at a pioneering kit reuse scheme aiming to make the game more inclusive and sustainable

**S**pencer CC is a behemoth of a cricket club. Founded in 1872 and based in South-West London, they are the largest recreational cricket club in the UK, boasting a membership of more than 1,600 and putting out as many as 74 teams per week. It's here that England internationals Alex Tudor and Gus Atkinson learnt their craft.

Spencer traditionally had a diverse membership but the numbers of African-Caribbean and South Asian cricketers coming through their doors had dwindled in recent years. "We got ourselves a reputation as being a white middle-class club," admits Jamie Greig, the club's managing director. "And that's probably the reality of what it was."

With the release of the ICEC report in 2023 bringing the game's diversity problem into sharper focus, the club re-examined the make-up of their membership and their wider role in the local community.

"We've always hosted Wandsworth Schools tournaments and festivals, and we did small outreach bits and pieces, but following the ICEC report we established a separate outreach side to our club which is called Spencer ONE – ONE standing for 'Outreach', 'Nurture', 'Engage'. We're trying to encourage people [to join the club] who perhaps wouldn't have thought of Spencer, or had had an impression of Spencer and what it had become. We want to make entry easier for different groups who wouldn't have had the opportunity to play before."

The club are now running cricket programmes in Wandsworth's state schools and have become one of Surrey's hubs for disability cricket. They've also begun to tackle one of the most pressing issues facing the game at

recreational level, and a problem that is often neglected: access to kit.

Working alongside the Centre for Sustainable Design, Spencer ran a cricket gear and clothing reuse pilot scheme last year which distributed second-hand kit to local state schools, refugees and low-income households.

In partnership with the Surrey Cricket Foundation and Decathlon UK, who will be providing a drop-off point for kit at their Wandsworth store, Spencer are extending their reuse scheme this year, with more than 600 items already donated.

"I'm doing a stock check at the moment and it's actually really good quality kit," says Greig. "There's very little at all which needs to be thrown away. The idea initially is to help the primary schools and other refugee projects around us, people who can't afford the kit. We're also taking a certain amount of the kit ourselves so that when we have people joining us who can't afford hardball kit, then we've got stock for them. We're making up bags of kit that we can distribute to people."

With the price of kit soaring in recent years and cash-strapped families feeling the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, schemes such as this are vital if the ECB is to achieve its aim, as set out in the 2024-2028 Inspiring Generations strategy, of becoming "the most inclusive team sport in England and Wales" in the next three years. There's no more fundamental barrier to the game than not being able to get your hands on the kit to play it.

Concerningly, the Lord's Taverners charity – which delivered 30,000 items of gear to 58 projects in 2024 alone – recently wound up their own kit recycling programme after failing to find a commercial partner. And, given the knock-on effect on participation, it's puzzling that the ECB currently has



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**Jamie Greig, Spencer CC's managing director**

no kit reuse scheme in place. As the governing body discusses how best to spend the windfall from the sale of the Hundred franchises – 10 per cent (approximately £50m) of which has been ringfenced for the recreational game – this will surely be high on their agenda.

Spencer's size and infrastructure have made them the ideal guinea pig, but Greig believes there's no reason why similar programmes can't be rolled out across the country, particularly if centralised support is on offer. "I think it's a no-brainer," he says. "There's absolutely no reason why this can't be replicated through a series of county hubs."

As the game considers how it can become more inclusive, issues around the supply and sustainability of kit need to be at the heart of that conversation.

"The key thing we found out from doing the pilot scheme is that state schools have no budget for sports gear," says Martin Charter, director at the Centre of Sustainable Design and the driving force behind the programme. "If you get reuse schemes going at local level it ticks the environment box, it ticks the social and participation box, and it ticks the community box. It seems ridiculous that we've got all this kit stored in garages just sitting there." ■