

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

August/September 2021 Issue 98 | £5.95



SCHOOLS SPECIAL!

We talk to the head men at four of England's top schools - John Lyon, Sedburgh, Blundell's and Twyford. The weather and Covid have played havoc

MITCHELL AND WET!

In the groundstaff's office, where the walls are covered in old photos and cuttings of times gone by, Lee Williams caught up with David Mitchell, Carlisle United's fifty-four-year-old Stadium Manager, to discuss his career so far, recent renovation work and the flooding of 2015 when Storm Desmond ran amok in the North ... all whilst tucking into his late lunch

Marley and me

The Estonian Golf and Country Club has been voted in the Top 100 courses in Continental Europe four times in a row. Offering two courses with spectacular views along the Baltic Coast and Jagala River Delta, Head Greenkeeper Paul Marley spoke with us about managing the courses and the challenges his team face



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WELCOME TO

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Going out out

So, we made it to the end of lockdown and our world is returning to ‘normal’. However, the two industry shows that have been held recently certainly suggested that people just weren’t ready to venture out - or was it, given the time of year, that they were too busy, being Covid cautious and/or on holiday?

I attended both The Festival of Turf and The Sports & Grounds Expo (SAGE) during July, and it was so nice to get out and catch up with people face to face. Although footfall wasn’t quite what exhibitors would have hoped, the general feeling was that visitors had gone with a purpose. Everyone likes to see a bustling show but, at the end of the day, it comes down to value for money and many exhibitors said they had received some strong enquiries.

The show organisers reported they had received positive feedback from both visitors and exhibitors which had brought a buzz and energy back to the industry after the pandemic.

BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said: “It is the start of a strong new chapter. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the exhibitors who signed up to support BIGGA and its members at what we hope is the beginning of a strong new chapter for the golf and wider sports turf industry.”

Whilst SAGE Exhibition Manager Vicky Panniers commented that the show had massive potential: “The foundations for SAGE have now been set and have provided a strong starting point, from which we can build. The team are reviewing

carefully the feedback from the exhibitors and visitors to guarantee that we are actively incorporating the needs of the industry into SAGE 2022.”

What many people said throughout the shows was that the format of an outdoor event is very much welcomed, as it provides an opportunity for demo plots. The question comes about what time of year an outdoor show works? In summer, there are busy periods and holidays to contend with which could affect visitor numbers and, in winter, the weather could be abysmal. Also mentioned during both shows was the requirement for just one show... which we won’t go into at this time!

Looking forward, it won’t be long before SALTEX and BTME are upon us. Both shows have missed a year and I’m sure they will be welcome returns to the industry calendar.

**Kerry Haywood
Editor**



SAY THAT AGAIN!

“We are the same bunch of decent professionals that did our level best at Griffin Park, but we’re now Premier League groundsmen and the stakes are higher, as is the satisfaction”

Steve Honey, Brentford Football Club

“All I want to do is provide the best surfaces I can for people, but I also want to try and give back as much as I can to promote the industry”

Chris Lynch, John Lyon School

“All we do is cut grass, right? What can be so difficult? What a lot of golfers don’t understand is just how much goes into growing turf. Grass is not meant to be grown at 3-4mm and have one hundred plus people walking on it every day”

Paul Marley, Estonian Golf Club

“Our industry has become extremely commercial with people at the top squeezing as much revenue out of, essentially, the piece of turf as possible”

Martin South, Sedbergh School

“During the pandemic, when there were very real concerns the club would not see two hundred years, our Enville family stood together”

Paul Clarke, Enville Cricket Club

“Unless the likes of Sky Sports were to explain why these courses look so pristine, compared to their local course, we will never get this information out to the broader world”

Brian Story, Silloth on Solway

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COVER STORY: Mitchell and Wet!

In the groundstaff's office, where the walls are covered in old photos and cuttings of times gone by, Lee Williams caught up with David Mitchell, the club's fifty-four-year-old Stadium Manager, to discuss his career so far, recent renovation work and the flooding of 2015 when Storm Desmond ran amok in the North ... all whilst tucking into his late lunch. **P40**

GOLF

Homebase to feeling at home

Part parkland and part woodland course, Redditch Golf Club winds its way through an abundance of trees, paving a spectacular setting for golf. Recently promoted Course Manager, James Harrison (Jam), has been at the club for the last six years and is testament that hard work and dedication pays off. **P16**

Marley and me

The Estonian Golf and Country Club has been voted in the Top 100 courses in Continental Europe four times in a row. Offering two courses with spectacular views along the Baltic Coast and Jagala River Delta, Head Greenkeeper Paul Marley spoke with us about managing the courses and the challenges his team face. **P24**

Life of Brian

Silloth on Solway Golf Club is one of the best hidden golfing gems in England. Situated on the Cumbrian coast, the course is blessed with stunning views of the Galloway Hills to the north, south to the Lakeland fells and, in the distance, the Isle of Man. Lee Williams met with Brian Story, the club's Course Manager who has been carefully manicuring the course to perfection for nearly forty years. **P32**

WINTER SPORTS

Working with the new normal

Six months on from the last FIFA Update, Blair Ferguson talks with the world governing body's Senior Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson, about the recent regional tournaments that were impacted by COVID-19, and the up and coming 'world' tournaments due to be held over the coming months and years. **P50**

Bees' Honey of a pitch

When Brentford FC won the play-off for a place in the Premier League in May it put them back in the top flight of English football where they hadn't been since the 1946/7 season. Neville Johnson went to the club's impressive new stadium to see how its Head Groundsman Steve Honey was set for the challenges ahead. **P56**

Drum roll please!

Upgrades to the infrastructure at Eastleigh Football Club's Silverlake Stadium have been followed up by extensive pitch improvements as the club aim to leave the Vanarama National League and push to reach the Football League. Phil Helmn MG talked to Head Groundsman Dan Barnes about the work being undertaken. **P62**

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SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Passion, Presentation, Progression

Career progression for his staff is vitally important to John Lyon School's Grounds Manager Chris Lynch and, as he tells Blair Ferguson, coupled with a passion for the job and presentation designed to create an impression, life at this premier educational establishment has been a whirlwind experience. **P68**

The breeding grounds

Located in magnificent scenery between the Lake District National Park and the Yorkshire Dales, Sedbergh School is renowned for its top-level achievement in a wide variety of sports, with boys and girls featuring prominently in national and international teams. Lee Williams caught up with Grounds Manager Martin South who, along with his trusted team, have vastly improved the playing surfaces since he joined twenty years ago. **P76**

Props to the Cox

Blundell's School is a co-educational day and boarding independent school in Tiverton, Devon. It was founded in 1604 (under the will of Peter Blundell) - one of the richest men in England at the time - and moved to its present site on the outskirts of the town in 1882. Grounds Manager Graham Cox has been looking after the site for the past eighteen months and spoke to Kerry Haywood about taking on a role during the pandemic. **P84**

A kind of magic!

Spare time is not something that Matt Trickett, Head Groundsman at Twyford School, has a lot of. Phil Helmn MG caught up with him to find out how he manages to look after a huge acreage of sports turf single handedly. As one of his desert island album titles suggests, it's a kind of magic! **P92**



Brian Story, Course Manager at Silloth on Solway Golf Club

SUMMER SPORTS

Wait a minute Mr Postman

Situated amongst the rolling hills and valleys of Bridgnorth, Staffs, Envile Cricket Club has hosted games since 1821. As they celebrated their 200th anniversary, Kerry Haywood met with groundsman Paul Clarke to discuss the vast achievements of the club and how he maintains the pitches around his full-time postman position. **P98**



Chris Lynch, John Lyon School

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Blackpool illuminated

Street cleansing and Groundcare may appear unlikely bedfellows but they are buddying up well in Blackpool. Greg Rhodes talks 'integration' to Grounds Maintenance Coordinator Nick Horner. **P102**



Dan Barnes, Eastleigh Football Club

CONSERVATION

Framing 'wild' verges

As seven out of ten councils make efforts to encourage wildflowers on road verges*, Alastair Rowell, UK sales manager for turfcare equipment at Reesink Turfcare, looks at the effect this has had on the way councils, local authorities and contractors maintain their green spaces and the machinery they use. **P110**



Paul Clarke, Envile Cricket Club

PUBLIC PLACES

Newby's newcomer

With much to offer everyone, Newby Hall and Gardens, set in forty acres alongside the banks of the River Ure near Ripon in North Yorkshire, form part of a 519-acre estate. David Mears was recently invited to meet Newby's newcomer; Head Gardener Phil Cormie - on a day the property was closed to the public - and was afforded full access to the gardens. **P114**



Paul Marley, Estonian Golf Club

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Expert urges ban of toxic artificial football pitches

Professor Andrew Watterson, from Stirling University, calls for Scotland to adopt new EU rules

A top scientist has called for a crackdown on artificial football pitches made from cancer-causing chemicals.

In mid August, the European Commission imposed tough new restrictions on the manufacture of playing surfaces using rubber crumb.

Professor Andrew Watterson, from Stirling University, an expert in public and environmental health, wants Scotland to follow suit and for the pitches to be phased out completely.

He says more needs to be done to protect the health of the thousands of adults and children who play football every week on artificial grass.

Rubber crumb is made from recycled car tyres, and the black pellets are used to improve the bounce of the ball.

Tests show they contain small amounts of potentially toxic and carcinogenic chemicals including mercury, lead, and arsenic.

From 10th August, the amount of chemicals found in the rubber must be reduced by 500 percent on safety grounds in European Union countries.

However because the UK officially left the EU in January, the tough new rules won't apply here.

The Dutch have also announced plans to phase out all rubber crumb sports pitches by 2030.

Prof Watterson would like to see the Scottish Government, the Health and Safety Executive and Councils carry out more safety checks on

artificial surfaces like those in five-a-side football centres.

He said: "We need to move away from pitches using hazardous materials and processes. We need a proper analysis of the impact of rubber crumb on pitches and playgrounds and explore ways and means to reduce or remove the hazardous substances in them."

"This could be by substituting much safer materials, for example natural grass."

"After decades of use, we still lack detailed knowledge about the possible uptake of chemicals from artificial surfaces." Prof Watterson says there is no reason why Holyrood could not adopt the new EU ruling, as environmental protection is devolved.

He added: "The Scottish Government should advise local authorities that the funding it receives should be spent only on sustainable artificial pitches, natural grass pitches and playground surfaces."

Watterson says there is also a danger that the chemicals from crumb rubber artificial pitches could enter the water supply and further damage the environment and damage fish stocks.

The new EU ruling comes into force later this month. Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have all said they will be adopting the measure and notifying pitch manufacturers.



Professor Andrew Watterson, Stirling University

Prof Watterson added: "When you could get large populations exposed to even small doses of what are known to be dangerous chemicals over a long period of time, that is a real concern."

Public Health Scotland said a safety review of artificial playing surfaces was carried out in 2017. It added: "It was due to be updated in 2020 but has been paused due to the pandemic."

The Health and Safety Executive said it would look at the new EU proposals to see if they should be adopted in the UK.

Scottish Football Association rules state that all clubs using synthetic pitches must comply with quality standards set by the governing body FIFA.

Two new GMA surveys

The Grounds Management Association (GMA) is once again looking to gather feedback from the turfcare community.

Members and non-members can offer their view on what they value and would like to see going forward, by taking part in two surveys - one for individuals working across the sector and one for businesses or suppliers operating in it. The surveys will be open to all respondents until **1st September 2021**.

All respondents of the survey will also have the opportunity to enter a prize draw, with four £50 Amazon vouchers up for grabs. Respondents who wish to remain anonymous can do so.

The GMA previously conducted member research in August 2020 and is looking to build on this research whilst gathering feedback that will inform activity over the next



year. Through gathering qualitative and quantitative data, this review will analyse the benefits and offering of the membership, looking at what respondents believe are the most valuable, and what aspects of the offering may require improvement. Any necessary feedback will start to be implemented later this year, following an

analysis of all data gathered, and continue beyond 2021.

For the individual survey, visit:
<https://bit.ly/3xnn7bj>

For the corporate survey, visit:
<https://bit.ly/3jcdtUb>

SAPCA warn of shortages

Brexit, 'pingdemic' and transport delays blamed for shortages

SAPCA say that the supply of products for the construction sector, with projects of all kind, including sports facilities, is being affected by constant changes in the availability and cost of a range of products and materials essential to all building projects.

There appears to be no immediate alleviation in sight. In fact, the situation is, if anything, being exacerbated in two ways - by the marketplace being "overheated" with exceptional demand (including the summer holidays and the DIY market), and the labour shortages relating to the "pingdemic" and people being told to self-isolate.

SAPCA say it is important to reiterate that these issues are not limited specifically to the sports and play construction sector. These are problems of a global and national scale.

The spikes in building material costs - and unforeseen delays in delivery times - are some of the unexpected consequences of the pandemic and will likely continue for some time. The volatility is caused by a "perfect storm" of various factors and issues. These include the increased costs and scarcity of raw



materials - from oil to steel to aggregates - and fluctuations in exchange rates.

In the UK, things have been made worse by the lack of drivers due to Brexit complications (freight and transport companies estimate that 15,000 European truck drivers left the UK in the last year), increased oil prices and competing demands for materials (particularly aggregates) as a result of HS2.

This volatility is likely to be something we must live with for a while to come - and it could have a significant impact on the timeframes and delivery costs of many projects. It is worth pointing out that contractors could be exposed to commercial pressure, as some of their contracts do not account for the current material price and delivery volatility.

While there may be little that our industry can do to influence any of these economy-wide factors, SAPCA members will certainly do their best to mitigate any disruption. Contractors will always seek to secure the supply of products

and materials for contracts that they have been awarded as early as possible. However, in many cases, these will of course be supplied on a "first come, first served" basis.

SAPCA say members are working hard to deliver projects with the minimum of delay, but where there are unavoidable delays, clients may need to be patient and to be flexible in scheduling the use of their completed facilities.

All those involved in the development of sports and play facilities may find it helpful to take this situation into consideration when planning and managing their projects this year. For example, contractors and suppliers may be forced to review the periods of time that they are able to hold prices when giving quotations, and the timescales for project delivery may also be affected.

SAPCA will continue to monitor the situation closely. Please visit sapca.org.uk for the latest news and information.

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FSIF release survey for clubs

Football Stadia Improvement Fund creates centralised digital database for lower leagues

As part of the ongoing review of the Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF), the Football Foundation recently carried out a survey of all the Clubs that play at Step 1 to 6 and Tier 1 to 4 of the National League System (NLS) and Women's Football Pyramid (WFP).

One of the key findings of the initial survey was that clubs suggested that the creation a centralised digital database of all of the stadiums in the NLS and WFP would be a welcome addition, and therefore they are now looking at beginning to learn much more about the grounds used across the pyramids.

The FSIF will therefore this summer begin to collate information so that the Football Foundation can develop and evolve a database of the facilities that can be used for the benefit of your club, your league, The FA and the FSIF - and help them to target funding where it is needed the most to support clubs. It will help to shape the FSIF criteria going forward and



prioritise the most pressing areas of the non-league game whilst, at the same time, informing The FA's Ground Grading criteria as they look to assist clubs in developing their facilities to improve the overall financial sustainability of the clubs at this level of the game.

Provision of this information will be a mandatory requirement ahead of any future FSIF application so, in order to maintain eligibility for FSIF funding and any other funding opportunities that the Football Foundation make during the 2021/22 season, clubs were asked to complete the survey by Friday 6th August 2021.

Links to the survey have been sent directly to Club Secretaries at Step 1 to 6 and Tier 1 and 2 via email. If clubs have any queries, they should email enquiries@footballfoundation.org.uk in the first instance. Please note that the survey for clubs that play in the Women's Football Pyramid at Tier 3 and 4 will be released to those clubs in August.



Massive potential say organisers

**The Sports & Grounds Expo 2021:
The Potential Is Massive**

The organisers would like to thank everyone who attended and supported the inaugural year of The Sports & Grounds Expo (SAGE), at The Three Counties Showground, 27-29 July.

Exhibition Manager Vicky Panniers commented: "The challenges of the last year have had a huge impact on events, and the support and positive feedback from visitors, speakers and exhibitors is greatly appreciated and vital to the future of the event. The foundations for SAGE have now been set and have provided a strong starting point, from which we can build."

"The central location of The Three Counties Showground, as well as the vast amount of space on offer, provides the perfect venue."

"The huge amount of positive feedback received, from both visitors and exhibitors, has cemented SAGE 2022 in the calendar for next summer."

"Over 75% of our exhibitors have said they would definitely return to exhibit, with zero saying they would not, which is a fantastic testament of support from our founding exhibitors. From the visitor surveys, over 85% of visitors are looking forward to returning in 2022. The team are reviewing carefully the feedback from the exhibitors and visitors to guarantee that we are actively incorporating the needs of the industry into SAGE 2022."



"The potential of what SAGE is capable of is huge for the industry and we look forward to making 2022 bigger and better!"

For more information, contact the team by email: team@sportsandgrounds.co.uk or visit the website: www.sportsandgrounds.co.uk.

Dates for 2022 will be released over the

coming weeks on the SAGE website and across all of their social media platforms.



Start of a “strong new chapter”

Festival of Turf toast the re-emergence of the sports turf industry following relaxed COVID-19 regulations

The turfcare industry reunited for the first time in over eighteen months at the Warwickshire Event Centre as the inaugural Festival of Turf took place beneath clear blue skies.

With live music playing on a grand stage and ample opportunities for networking, the exhibition brought a celebratory festival feel, aided by clear sunshine and warm weather.

COVID protocols helped to ensure the health and safety of those in attendance and the festival provided a platform for more than 40 exhibitors from across the turfcare industry to showcase their latest innovations and products.

Also taking place was the presentation of the BIGGA Excellence in Communication Award sponsored by Campey Turf Care Systems, which saw James Bledge, course manager at Royal Cinque Ports, awarded the top prize for a



thought-provoking feature he produced on the use of bunker rakes.

Across the two-day event, delegates from across various sports and amenity disciplines came through the doors of the Warwickshire Event Centre, bringing a buzz and energy back to the industry that had sadly been missing due to the coronavirus pandemic.

BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said: "We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all the exhibitors who signed up to support BIGGA and its members at what we hope is the beginning of a strong new chapter for the golf and wider sports turf industry."

"Our attention now turns to BTME, taking place this coming January, when the exhibition will return to the Harrogate Convention Centre for the first time since 2020. We have a massive education programme planned and we are incredibly excited about the return of our flagship event. We hope to see you there."

BTME will take place at the Harrogate Convention Centre on Tuesday 25 to Thursday 27 January 2022. Visitor registration is due to open this autumn. There will also be the return of in-person learning as BIGGA's world leading Continue to Learn education programme returns to the venue on Sunday 23 to Wednesday 26 January 2022.

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Milestone anniversary

Football Foundation commits to continuing transformation of grassroots football facilities as it reaches milestone anniversary

The Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation celebrate 21 years of transforming lives through the power of football, having funded over 20,400 grassroots football facility grants across the country. The Foundation is set to start work to deliver bespoke plans for every community in England to give the country the grassroots infrastructure it deserves.

Last month, the Football Foundation celebrated 21 years of delivering facilities that have unlocked the power of pitches - helping to transform lives and communities throughout England. Since its creation by the Premier League, The FA and the Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Foundation and its partners have unlocked £1.8 billion of investment to improve local football facilities across England. It has delivered over 20,400 grants to improve facilities, including 958 3G pitches, 8,726 natural grass pitches and 1,223 changing facilities - all of which are accessible and welcoming to everyone.

In celebrating this milestone and its achievements to date, the Football Foundation is now looking to the future and working to ensure communities up and down the country have better access to great places to play and the facilities they deserve.

Following the recent announcement from the Government that a further £50m will be invested into community sports facilities - the second tranche of the £550m already



committed by Government last year which builds upon £25 million announced by the Chancellor at the Budget earlier this year - the Foundation is working to fund a range of new projects identified within the Local Football Facility Plans it has created for every community across England, targeting investment where it is needed most.

These plans are the culmination of two years of work with local authorities, County FAs and other stakeholders to identify projects that together represent a blueprint for building what each community needs and deserves. Great players like Harry Kane, Kalvin Phillips and Harry Maguire played on facilities the Foundation funded as they grew up, proving what a difference good grassroots facilities can make.

By ensuring this funding committed by the Government flows through to the grassroots game, combined with the success of the England men's football team and upcoming

Women's Euros in 2022, the Football Foundation and its partners believe they have a landmark opportunity to truly capitalise on the passion for the national game and unlock the power of football for those who need it most.

Premier League Chief Executive Richard Masters said: "The Premier League is proud to have funded thousands of grassroots facilities through the Football Foundation and its sister organisation the Football Stadia Improvement Fund over the last 21 years."

"This is an exciting time for football, with a positive Euro 2020 campaign for England inspiring more people to play sport. It is important that people of all ages in communities up and down the country continue to have access to high-quality pitches and facilities. We look forward to working alongside our fellow partners to deliver many more projects in the years to come."

Perry Dye, ASGCA, dies at age 68

Perry Dye, ASGCA, died July 8, 2021 in Denver. He was age 68. A member of one of the most famous families in golf, Dye received his first experience building golf courses at age 12, when he began an apprenticeship under his father, American Society of Golf Course Architects Past President Pete Dye. He accompanied his father to work on sites in the Midwest and the Dominican Republic through his youth and college years.

Perry formed Dye Designs in 1984. The company is known for building unique, environmentally sensitive golf courses. In 1986, Dye Designs further expanded internationally as Perry recognized the growing demand and market for world-wide golf services. In Japan alone, Perry designed nearly two dozen golf courses, and Dye-designed facilities can be found in more than 15 countries.

With more than 80 courses to his credit, Perry's dedication to golf included promoting growth within the golf course industry by cooperating with and supporting industry and professional

groups, civic organisations and the general public. A member of the Golf Course Builders Association of America, in 2004 he received the inaugural award that bears his name - the Perry O. Dye Service Award - which honours "exceptional individuals who have unselfishly contributed their influence to foster positive changes for the association and have continually endeavoured to make it better."

"This is a great loss for golf design, but right now we should all be sending our love and support to the Dye Family," ASGCA President Forrest Richardson said. "Perry and I shared many good times, and I am so grateful to have spent time with him at the 2020 Golf Industry Show just before the COVID lockdowns began. As usual, he was full of life, smiling and telling stories. We will miss him."

Courses designed by Perry Dye, ASGCA, include: Pound Ridge Golf Club, Pound Ridge, New York; West One's Country Club, Kato, Hyogo, Japan; Desert Pines Golf Club, Las Vegas; Auburn Hills, Wichita, Kansas; and Lykia Links, Antalya, Turkey.



Dye became an ASGCA member in 1996 and served on the ASGCA Board of Governors. He was preceded in death by his parents, ASGCA Past Presidents Pete and Alice Dye. He is survived by his brother, P.B. Dye, ASGCA, wife Ann, children and their spouses Lucy (Erik) Bowman and Lilly (Ross) Harmon, and grandchildren Brooks and Margaret Harmon.

As Perry would say "Keep it in the fairway." A Celebration of Life will be planned for later this autumn.



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New PPP regs

New plant protection product regulations introduced

A revised policy statement has recently been added to The Official Controls (Plant Protection Products) Regulations 2020.

These apply to the whole of Great Britain and supplement existing regulations that govern the sale and use of plant protection products or PPPs. The Northern Ireland Executive has put in place its own legislation implementing and enforcing official controls for PPPs.

The regulations are in place to:

- allow regulatory authorities to enforce legal requirements that apply to the placing on the market and use of PPPs throughout the supply chain
- explain the action enforcement authorities can take where non-compliance is identified or suspected

The 2020 Regulations also apply to components of PPPs such as active substances, synergists, co-formulants and to adjuvants.

The Amenity Forum have said that under the Regulations, businesses concerned with the placing on the market of PPPs authorised for professional use, and/or the placing on the market of components of PPPs, are required to notify competent authorities of their details and business activities by 22nd September 2021. This includes businesses that produce, manufacture, process, import, distribute and sell those products. Information will be requested about company details and contact information, product types, storage and capacity.

Similarly, all users of PPPs in a professional capacity will need to follow a similar process by 22nd June 2022. Further information is to be provided for these businesses over the coming months. The HSE will operate controls and enforce the 2020 Regulations in Great Britain, taking a proactive, risk-based approach. It is also expected that Local Authorities will have a role. Enforcement of existing PPP regulations will remain unchanged.



DEFRA, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are finalising the details of the control programme. These will be provided in communications over the coming months and the Amenity Forum has already engaged with all involved in such discussions. As further information becomes available, the Forum will issue further releases. These control measures come at a time of significant policy change when the UK Government is already preparing its revised and refreshed National Action Plan in relation to weed, pest and disease management.

The Amenity Forum say a key element of their conference will be a focus on policy change and how it impacts on the sector. The conference is to be held at the Pirelli Stadium in Burton on Trent on 21st October. Registration for the conference and associated exhibition is now open and further information can be obtained by contacting Kate at admin@amenityforum.net. Given support from the sector, this allows ticket price to be maintained at 2019 levels of £95 with early bird discounts for registrations prior to 1st September.

Professor John Moverley, Chairman of the Amenity Forum, said: "This issued policy statement is highly significant for our sector. However, those operating to professional standards have nothing to fear and such controls chime well with the introduction of the UK Amenity Standard, providing full assurance to all involved that organisations are meeting requirements seeking to create safe and sustainable amenity and sports spaces fit for purpose."

New NSK Amenity Training Course

BASIS has launched the NSK Amenity Training Course, a new bespoke course for storekeepers working in industries within the amenity sector, for example lawn care, property maintenance, greenkeeping and sports turf management.

This new qualification has been fully accredited by Harper Adams University and is being recognised by CRD as a Certificate of Competence for any professional storekeeper working within the amenity sector.

BASIS has been successfully delivering training and qualifications for storekeepers working within professional pesticide stores for the past 35 years through their industry recognised Nominated Storekeeper (NSK) Training Course. Not only has this provided storekeepers with the training they require as stipulated within UK regulations and the Code of Practice for suppliers of pesticides (The Yellow Code), but has also allowed professionals to learn the principles of good storekeeping, which ensures pesticides are stored in a way which protects the general public, safeguards the environment and avoids the pollution of water.

However, it has been recognised that there is a requirement for a NSK training course which is specifically targeted at storekeepers working within industries such as lawn care, sports turf management, greenkeeping and all other areas within the amenity sector.

Ensuring that professional pesticides are stored in a responsible way is extremely important across all industries and anyone responsible for this is required to complete adequate training. However, the current NSK training course did not necessarily meet all the requirements for a storekeeper working within the amenity sector.

GTC releases revised Level 3 Learning Materials

The Advanced Golf Greenkeeper Learning Materials, developed for the Level 3 Apprenticeship, are now available for golf clubs and individuals to purchase from the Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC).

Members of the GTC board, pictured right in 2019, regularly meet to discuss ways to improve greenkeeper education.

These best practice learning materials, compiled by industry specialists, are based upon principles and practices for advanced golf course maintenance and management.

Originally compiled to provide the underpinning knowledge for the Level 3 qualification, the GTC Board of Directors and the Employer Group have championed the revision of the copyright Learning Materials. Divided into 10 chapters, they cover best practices including health and safety, advanced golf course preparation and maintenance, construction of golf course

features, environmental management, finance and project management.

All GTC-BIGGA Approved Training Providers will receive a copy of the Learning Materials, for use with all greenkeeping students on the advanced greenkeeping courses.

The 392-page publication is now available in digital format from the GTC shop. Visit: www.the-gtc.co.uk/shop/

GTC Learning and Development Executive, Fiona Lyttle, said: "We are incredibly proud to present the revised Level 3 Learning Materials. After recently reviewing and updating the Level 2 Learning Materials, it became necessary to develop materials appropriate for students learning at the higher level. The Level 3 qualification now incorporates more knowledge and skills that are required at a supervisory level. These materials home in on the knowledge required and how to deliver those skills. The GTC has ensured the Learning



Materials are suitable for everyone, from apprentices to golf course managers, with all subjects comprehensively covered."

The GTC is supported by England Golf, Scottish Golf, Wales Golf, The PGA and BIGGA. For further information on the GTC's Learning Materials, contact Fiona Lyttle on 01347 838 640 or fiona@the-gtc.co.uk

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BIGGA and Reesink Turfcare reveal the finalists of the 2021 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards



After a year's hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards are returning for 2021, with the search on to find the country's best up-and-coming greenkeepers.

Each year the awards enable BIGGA to work alongside turf maintenance equipment manufacturer Toro and distributor Reesink Turfcare to celebrate the next generation of talented and dedicated greenkeepers.

A record 49 nominees from across the United Kingdom participated in regional interviews. These candidates were nominated by their employers or colleague tutors and from those candidates a final 12 have been chosen to contest the grand final this September.

For the first time, the finals of the awards will take place at Celtic Manor Resort on Monday 6th and Tuesday 7th September 2021, providing an incredible backdrop to the event and giving the opportunity for the finalists to learn more and be inspired by the maintenance of the championship venue.

September's event will be the 32nd staging of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards and just the fifth time the Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award, open to greenkeepers aged 21 or under, will take place.

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year finalists are:

Leon Brant, assistant greenkeeper at Wexham Park Golf Club

John Le Cappelain, apprentice greenkeeper at Royal Jersey Golf Club

Daryn Curtis, greenkeeper at Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club

Matthew McCreadie, greenkeeper at Daventry & District Golf Club

Matthew Milligan, first assistant at Rudding Park Golf Club

Michael Russell, greenkeeper and ecology manager at Preston Golf Club

The Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year finalists are:

Rhian Barton, apprentice greenkeeper at The Wisley Golf Club

Greg Manson, apprentice greenkeeper at Mortonhall Golf Club

Callum Marjoribanks, apprentice greenkeeper at Mortonhall Golf Club

Ross McKie, apprentice greenkeeper at St Andrews Links

Will Pallister, apprentice greenkeeper at Cleckheaton & District Golf Club

Cameron Shanks, apprentice greenkeeper at Bothwell Castle Golf Club

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year winner will receive an eight-week all expenses-paid scholarship to America when restrictions allow, including a six-week residential turf management study course at the University of Massachusetts, a trip to the Golf Industry Show in San Diego, California, and a visit to Toro manufacturing facilities.

The Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year winner will receive a work experience placement at the exclusive Vidauban Golf Club in southern France. They will also receive a trip to Continue to Learn at BTME and enjoy a five-night package that includes hotel, four days of education, travel and £125 expenses, plus a Toro training voucher.

Sami Strutt, head of learning & development at BIGGA, said: "Taking place in the grand setting of Celtic Manor Resort, this year's finals will be unlike any other and I can't wait to meet everyone this September for what stands to be a wonderful few days. My thanks go to Toro and Reesink UK for their continued support and also thanks go to everyone who took part or nominated a candidate this year."

David Cole, Reesink Turfcare managing director and award sponsor, said: "From the interviewing process to identify our finalists, we can take that the greenkeeping profession continues to be in bright and focused hands. Reesink Turfcare and Toro's long support of this educational award is constantly rewarded by the enthusiasm, career passion and commitment to personal development that we come across every year."

Maurice Flitcroft film set for November cinema release



A film about the remarkable true story of Maurice Flitcroft, the crane operator from Barrow-in-Furness who managed to hoodwink the R&A into letting him take part in final qualifying for the 1976 Open Championship, despite never having played golf before, is set to hit the cinema screens this autumn.

The Phantom of the Open, which is being distributed in the UK by eOne, sees Oscar-winning actor Mark Rylance playing Flitcroft, and will be shown in cinemas throughout the UK and Ireland from November 5.

Flitcroft entered Open Qualifying in 1976 as a professional, despite never having played on a golf course before, and racked up a 49-over-par score of 121 in his opening round before he was rumbled by the R&A, asked to leave the course and banned from future tournaments. He tried, unsuccessfully, to enter subsequent Open qualifying events using aliases such as Gene Paychecky and James Beau Jolley. He died in 2007 at the age of 78.

The film is directed by filmmaker and actor Craig Roberts, from a screenplay by Simon Farnaby, who adapted the script from his own book "The Phantom of the Open: Maurice Flitcroft, The World's Worst Golfer", co-written by Scott Murray.

American Johnny Miller was the eventual winner of the Open, played at Royal Birkdale, six strokes ahead of runners-up Seve Ballesteros and Jack Nicklaus.

BASIS Points for magazine subscribers

BASIS awards two CPD points for 'paid-for' subscribers to the hard copy version of Pitchcare magazine, due to the "diverse range of content that relates to the control, management and use of pesticides".

Subscribers can now obtain a further two valuable CPD points for their Professional

register, simply by paying for a subscription to the 'hard copy' version of the Pitchcare magazine.

Anyone wishing to claim their points should email their full name, BASIS membership number, date of birth and postcode to editor@pitchcare.com.



*BASIS is an independent standards setting and auditing organisation for the pesticide, fertiliser and allied industries.

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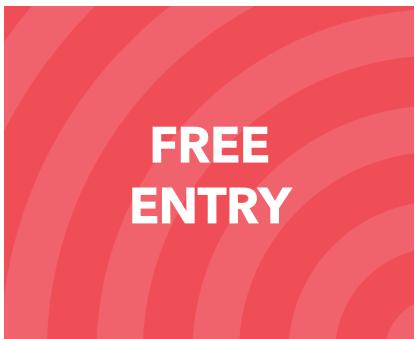


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Say no to plastic bags (and plastic pitches too)

Football365 champion natural tuf pitches following Tracey Crouch's interim findings from the Fan Led Review into Football Governance

The grass is always greener and 3G pitches in the EFL are a bad idea despite the Minister of Sport's commitment to the idea...

A hot Thursday in the UK, with the country in a sweat and sports fans mourning the Euros, contemplating actually watching the Olympics opening ceremony or, God forbid, the cricket Hundred.

Thank the Lord then for Tracey Crouch's letter to Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the fan-led review into football governance. Just what everyone needs with their Marks & Spencer posh dog BBQ, a nice slice of dry football reform...

There were a lot of good things in the letter, particularly the focus on an independent regulator, enough to send those elements in football who like to operate in the shadows scurrying for their offshore account passcodes.

Of course, the killer section of the letter was the one titled 'Navigating Financial Gaps', a somewhat understated way of describing the cash chasms between the top and bottom of the game.

As such, Crouch's keenness on allowing artificial pitches in the lower leagues is little more than window dressing which may do more harm than good.

"I am minded to recommend the removal of barriers to revenue generation in lower divisions, such as allowing clubs to operate all



weather pitches in League 2," wrote Crouch but without any figures on how renting out 3G pitches to the community is going to touch the sides of the multi-million pound operations of League 2 clubs.

Teams promoted from the National League with artificial surfaces, such as Harrogate and Sutton, will of course want to continue with them but, by permitting artificial surfaces in the EFL, you present cash-strapped chairmen with a cost-cutting option for grass pitch maintenance that will be all too tempting to resist.

Pitch care is an art that goes back centuries and, by digging up grass pitches and going plastic, you run the risk of putting legions of grounds people out of jobs. And this is without asking the EFL players what surfaces they actually want to play and train on, with the PFA already having proved resistant to the use of artificial pitches, questioning the financial benefits and asking questions over the potential for injury.

Three years' grace for promoted teams from the National League with artificial pitches

would seem fair, like the rule on going all-seater in the Championship. After that, Crouch's notion of 'finance flows' between divisions should include a pitch fund to help the likes of Sutton and Harrogate go grass without the headache.

Lower-league fans need to ask themselves the kind of football they want to watch too, the ball skimming off a slick turfed surface with the odd sliding tackle (and yes, mud baths) or the strange uniformity of 3G. Like the difference between horseracing on turf at Ascot or on the all-weather at Wolverhampton, the same sport but somehow different.

There's the real chance of a first and second-class divide in English football, with the Premier League played on terrific grass surfaces with real investment in turf technology, and the lower leagues a plastic cheapo product, no doubt at some point regionalised and potentially, part-time.

The grass is always greener - and football needs wealth distribution, not diggers and rubber crumb!

Meanwhile over at the Senedd ... "We need more 3G pitches"

Laura Anne Jones, Member of the Senedd for South Wales East, offers her take on 3G pitches.

"One of my passions outside of politics is sport, especially football. As someone who used to be secretary of a local junior football club, I know, like many others, that one of the biggest challenges facing community football at all levels, is having pitches to train and play matches on, all year around.

As soon as we hit winter, many sports are adversely affected due to the weather impacting our grass pitches, therefore reducing the ability to train and play matches every week. 'Rain stopping play' being the norm for far too many people, children particularly.

There is only so much pitch rotation you can do to try and protect the pitches so you can have as much play time on them as possible. It's not only hugely disappointing for children and adults to not have anywhere to play and train during these winter months, and hampers all the benefits to developing skills that continuous training brings, it is also adversely

affecting their physical and mental health. Now more than ever, coming out of this pandemic, and with childhood obesity at such high levels in Wales, this needs to change.

Much investment has been made in our big towns and cities, which is of course welcome - offering all weather facility alternatives - but this investment doesn't go far enough. We need to get to a point where everyone has access to an all weather 3G pitch, within 10 mins of where they live. We ideally need 3G pitches placed strategically in rural areas, so as many surrounding clubs as possible will be able to access and use them as much as they need to, particularly in our wetter months.

We need community grade pitches, accessible to and for all to do a variety of sports on. We also need strategic investment of 3G pitches to support our lower league clubs, across all parts of Wales.

In Monmouthshire, for example we have three very successful football clubs in Goytre, Monmouth and Abergavenny and we need to give them higher grade artificial grass pitches to play on, to share if necessary.



To be fair, the government have listened to an extent and there is currently a commitment from Sport Wales to increase the amount of 3G pitches across Wales to 100 by 2024.

But still we need to think bigger and more strategically now, if we are going to find and support future sporting stars, and ensure our clubs are well equipped from community level up to our own Newport County and beyond, to ensure they have the tools that they need to enable children and adults to play sport to whatever levels they want, and the whole year round."



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Redditch Golf Club

Homebase to feeling at home

Part parkland and part woodland course, Redditch Golf Club winds its way through an abundance of trees, paving a spectacular setting for golf. Recently promoted Course Manager, **James Harrison** (Jam), has been at the club for the last six years and is testament that hard work and dedication pays off



//

Retail for me is not a nice job to be in; the late opening hours are not great and you would have to work every weekend. I decided it was not the career for me and I needed to look for an alternative path

The club was founded in 1913 but, due to the coming of Redditch new town, the club relocated to Callow Hill in November 1972 (designed by famous golf course architect Frank Pennick). Its construction is heavy clay, which Jam explains can have its advantages and disadvantages. "In winter, some areas of the course can suffer badly as water struggles to penetrate through it. However, throughout summer, when some of the sand-based golf courses are struggling with their fairways burning off, our clay profile is still holding onto moisture. Around twenty-six years ago, the push-up greens were dug out and reconstructed to USGA specifications, which is an absolute godsend for the course when we get heavy rainfall."

During winter, some areas can get really wet and getting the golfers around the course can be as challenging as keeping the course open for Jam and his team. "The

front nine is considerably drier than the back nine holes. We have begun to install buggy paths and extend existing paths in high traffic areas and wet spots. The idea is to enable the golfers to walk from the tee to the green without causing much damage to vulnerable areas of the course."

"Also, we are looking at installing drainage on the fifth, fifteenth and sixteenth fairways; it's a big project, so it will all come to down finance and if the club wants to go down that route."

Jam is keeping to what he knows when maintaining the greens and is a firm believer in 'if it isn't broke, don't fix it'. "In summer, we cut the greens using our Toro Greensmaster TriFlex 3420 at 3.5mm every day, depending on our spraying patterns. Even though most manufacturers say their products will be dry on the leaf in a certain amount of hours, if we spray one day, we will roll rather than cut the next day to ensure the product has enough time to get into the





plant and that we are getting the full benefit. If we have a big event, we will double cut and roll and, in winter, we will lift the height of the cut to 4.5mm and cut when required."

"Light verti-cutting is carried out every couple of weeks with the GreenTek units on the Toro 3420, at depths of between 2 to 4mm - this helps remove the lateral growth and keep the organic matter levels nice and low. It also helps increase ball speed and smoothness. Every month we will apply a light topdressing using two tonnes of sand over twenty greens, brush in and go over with the vibra-roll units to ensure the sand is well incorporated into the surface."

"As a rule, we will go over the greens with the Wiedenmann Terra Spike XP as deep as we can with the 20mm tines - once in March and again at the end of the season, followed by a heavy topdressing of sand. At least once a month, we will microtine using 8mm and 12mm tines at varying depths to ensure we do not create a pan."

Jam tells me he likes to have soil samples taken regularly by both Agrovista Amenity

and Headland Amenity and has a mixture of products across four different distributors for the coming season. "Throughout my last six years at the club, the greens have been in excellent condition, so I am not about to try and fix what isn't broken. I am still learning in my new position and I will keep a close eye on what is going on, look at what could be different and what we could possibly change. Then, at the end of the season, I will sit down with the reps and discuss my findings and determine if anything needs to change."

Jam is a relative newcomer to the industry and, at a time where our industry is struggling to entice the younger generation, Jam is the perfect example of what can be achieved - if you are willing to work hard and learn. "Whilst at college studying public services, I worked part-time at Homebase stocking the shop floor. When I passed my course, I was given a place at Wolverhampton University of Policing, with every intention of following in my gramps footsteps to become a police





officer. When I attended the open day, I asked if I was guaranteed a position in the force on completion of the course. At that time, they were not recruiting anyone under twenty-five years old and, by the time I finished, I would only have been twenty-three. So, I was unwilling to take the risk of doing another four years of education and then have to do a two-year gap before joining the police."

"I asked for more hours at Homebase and

started to work there full-time, working my way up to manager level - even opening a new store in Bromsgrove. Retail for me is not a nice job to be in; the late opening hours are not great and you would have to work every weekend. I decided it was not the career for me and I needed to look for an alternative path. One day, my dad told me he had seen a job advertised on Facebook for an assistant greenkeeper at Redditch Golf Club. He thought this may be an

excellent opportunity for me and a great fit, as I have played golf since I was a kid and I love the game. I didn't have anything to lose and got the job, even though I had no prior greenkeeping experience."

Given Jam was new to the industry, I wanted to know if he was classed as an apprentice or an assistant greenkeeper. "I never had the title of apprentice; I think the course manager at the time, Karl Williams, considered my previous experience as

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Getting Personal

James Harrison - I don't know what he has against chickens?

Who are you? James Harrison, Course Manager at Redditch Golf Club.

Family status. Married for three years - together nearly ten. One beautiful little girl; Maggie (just over eighteen months old).

Who's your hero and why? My dad, the biggest family man who supported me through everything I've been through; both good and bad. He will never know how thankful I am!

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Being offered the opportunity to be Course Manager at Redditch Golf Club and has proven that hard work and determination really pays off.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? What a legend!

What job would you love, other than your own? I had full intentions of following in my Gramps footsteps in going into the Police Force when I was in college.

What is your favourite film? Any film with Rowan Atkinson in ... What a guy he is!

What scares you? Sitting on the side of a fairway waiting for a golfer to play their shot.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? 'I made it' - Rowan Atkinson.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Christmas time, a few years ago. I needed to grab one last present for my girlfriend (now wife). I knew she wanted pyjamas, and what better place to visit other than Primark. The plan was quick and easy; in, grab pj's, pay and home..! It went according to the plan except when I was on my way down the aisle towards 'till 8' an old lady pushed her wheelie bag straight into my path. I ended up on the floor face down in front of thirtyish people.



What would you cast into Room 101? Chickens! I don't eat chicken!

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? WW1 - it would be amazing to witness.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? My mom, nan and grandad - I'd do anything to be able to make this happen.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Keep smiling and good things are only just round the corner.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? Bubble wrap was first invented to be a 3D wallpaper.

What's your favourite smell? A bonfire.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Michael Jackson, Maroon 5 and Scouting For Girls.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? I always wondered how you filled the old hole in (when changing the holes).

What's your favourite piece of kit? Hand mowers - I LOVE the finish they give.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Hardworking, fair and a good listener.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper? If you are unsure, ask.

What talent would you like to have? To be able to read music and play the piano.



a manager at Homebase and brought me in as an assistant. They put me straight through my NVQ Level Two in Sportsturf and, as soon as I passed that, straight onto my Level Three."

Jam is a believer that everything happens for a reason and, in March 2019, the opportunity arose to apply for the deputy head position. He was given the job and made the most of showing Karl and the club what he could do, which has now paid off in dividends. "In February 2021, after working wonders here at Redditch, Karl decided he wanted a new challenge. This opened up the position of course

manager and it was definitely the next step I wanted in my career development. The greens chairman and general manager approached me and asked if I wanted the position and if I was ready for it. Of course I said yes and I was given the position on a probationary period at the start of April."

"Once Karl was given the news, he stepped back and gave me the reins in his final weeks, which was great for me because I still had him there to answer any questions and I could pick his brains."

I asked Jam how he finds the job so far with the added pressures that come with being a course manager.





"I am really enjoying it and we have received some great comments so far about the course. However, it has been quite challenging over the last couple of months with the cold nights and heavy rainfall which has limited the growth, but we are getting there."

Regardless of only being in the position a few months, Jam has a good idea of how he wants to manage his team and what minor improvements he can adopt to improve

the solid structure in place. "I believe everyone has their own management style. I completed quite a few management courses in my past career, which helped me develop my techniques of managing staff and talking to customers. This means even in a heated situation with a golfer, I can approach them correctly and, in the same way, manage the lads to get the best out of them."

"Most of what I know has come from listening, asking questions and watching the

The new system has been an absolute game-changer. It allows us to apply water in millimetres and simply replacing the daily deficit every night has made a huge difference

way Karl managed the course. Being young, enthusiastic and at the start of my career, I am keen to put my own stamp on it. So, the hand mowers are going out a lot more; we are cutting areas that have not been hand mown before such as approaches, aprons and run-offs. The general condition of the course is very good and a lot of work has been undertaken over the past few years, including the renovation of all bunkers, so it is just of matter of maintaining them."



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The club embarked on a significant project in 2019; investing heavily in the installation of a fully automated Hunter irrigation system and they are now starting to see the benefits. "In 2015, Karl had an appraisal of the old irrigation system, which confirmed the inadequacies and poor reliability of the system, with continuous bursts and cable breaks, which resulted in an awful lot of hand watering. Following the summer of 2018, the proposal to install a completely new irrigation system was passed by the committee and approved by 97% of the club's members. A plan needed to be put into place quickly for the new system to cover all greens, tees, approaches and green surrounds. After speaking with Hunter Industries, there was no doubt in Karl's mind that it was the way to go due to the quality of their products."

I spoke to Wes Henshaw, National Golf Sales Manager K.A.R UK Ltd, who told me about the system's specifications installed

by Prime irrigation. "This included the Pilot CCS PC-based central control system - a software package that makes central control of large-scale irrigation systems affordable, usable, and comprehensible. It also included G885D Series Rotors - which have a built-in decoder offering single head control, superior uniformity coupled with the TTS technology allowing every serviceable element of the rotor to be accessed through



He stepped back and gave me the reins in his final weeks, which was great for me because I still had him there to answer any questions and I could pick his brains

the top, so you can get to every component without disturbing the playing surface - no more digging, no more unsightly scars, and more importantly, one less item on a busy course manager's schedule. Also installed were I-20 Series Rotors on tees which utilise the Match Precipitation Rate (MPR) nozzles."

Jam commented: "The new system has been an absolute game-changer. It allows us to apply water in millimetres and simply replacing the daily deficit every night has made a huge difference. Even in the highest temperatures, the greens do not lose moisture and we no longer have to worry about them looking worn. They are consistently good, which is great from a player's point of view."



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- Toro Reelmaster 3100-D
- Toro Reelmaster 5610-D x 2
- Toro GreensPro 1240
- Toro Greensmaster 1000 x 2
- Toro Groundsmaster 4500-D
- Wiedenmann Terra Spike XP
- Kawasaki Mule x 2
- Smithco Tournament Ultra XXL
- Wright Sport I



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Estonian Golf and Country Club

Marley and me

The Estonian Golf and Country Club has been voted in the Top 100 courses in Continental Europe four times in a row. Offering two courses with spectacular views along the Baltic Coast and Jagala River Delta, Head Greenkeeper **Paul Marley** spoke with us about managing the courses and the challenges his team face. Kerry Haywood reports

//

It doesn't help that we are undervalued!... All we do is cut grass, right? What can be so difficult? What a lot of golfers don't understand is just how much goes into growing turf. Grass is not meant to be grown at 3-4mm and have one hundred plus people walking on it every day

The club offers golfers a 9-hole links style Stone Course and an 18-hole championship level Sea Course. The Sea Course surprises with its spectacular sea views impressively framed on its signature 3rd hole. The historic Stone Course meanders through impressive stone wall formations and massive boulders from the ice age telling of a history dating back over five thousand years.

Paul has a team of eight staff, plus three/four seasonal staff. Paul commented: "The majority of the staff have mostly been here for several years and they know the golf course very well. We also have an in-house mechanic and, with our old equipment, we couldn't do what we do without him. We undertake most of the

servicing and maintenance of the machines in-house, however, we do get help with some of the bigger jobs. Certain team members take on specific tasks (bunkers, tee maintenance, mowing tees etc.) but, for the most part, everyone is able to perform multiple tasks and be flexible with what gets done and when."

"From May-September, we also employ three or four seasonal staff who primarily help out on the driving range, line trim and blow. Currently, we do not have an agronomist, however, I do have several on speed dial who I can call up and ask for help at any time."

The profile of the course is predominantly soil/clay everywhere, except the tees and greens. "We are just beginning the process of amending the rootzone by adding a sand/

soil topdressing, as our cation exchange capacity (CEC) is extremely low. We have a lot of problems with our greens that begin with the low CEC, namely poor nutrient and moisture retention. As we get more organic material into the rootzone, we hope that this will help solve those problems."

"Estonia can have long, dark winters, but we don't suffer too much from natural occurrences. During my time here, there hasn't been anything too extreme - aside from the snow cover from early January until mid-March. Despite this, we very rarely have to use temporary greens. We generally close the Sea Course down late-October or early November, but up until then, we try to keep the golfers on the summer greens. Our Stone Course is much more tolerant, so we will allow golfers to play there as long as



View from the clubhouse



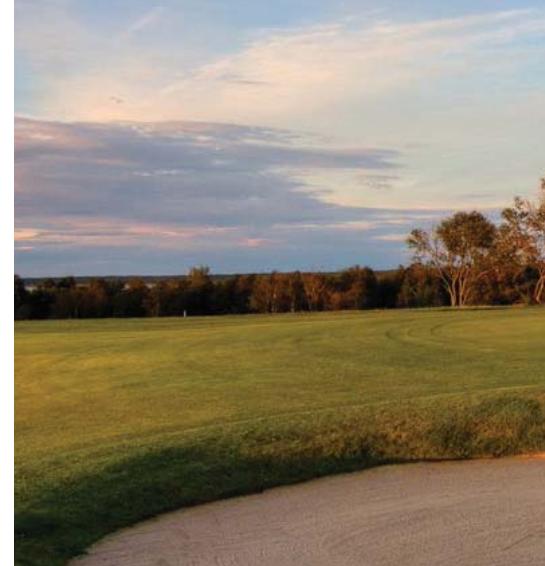
Head Greenkeeper Paul Marley
© Kadri Palta Photography



I have a team of eight staff, who have mostly been here for several years and they know the golf course very well

possible. Generally, when temporary greens might be used, the days are so short that we close the Stone course down (December-March). However, if the weather allows, we will keep that course open. During the winter of 2019-2020, we experienced such a mild winter that the Stone course was closed for a total of twenty-one days! But, seeing as every year is different, we keep a close eye on the greens even during the winter months and, if necessary, we will remove snow cover.”

“Having said that, when there is snow on the ground, we will groom a 5km cross-country ski trail on the course



grounds. The trail is maintained by the maintenance staff and is open to the public.”

“We used to suffer with both shade and air flow issues on the Sea course, however, we have started a tree maintenance programme to take down problem trees and to clear under-brush - which will increase airflow and sunlight to certain greens.”

“We mow greens just about every day and, depending on the tournament schedule, we will roll 1-2 times a week. Depending on growth, tees, fairways and collars will be mowed 2-3 times a week. We cut the rough on the Sea and Stone Courses once a week and then tidy up some spots that grow quicker prior to the weekend. We work to the following height of cut guidelines: greens 4mm, collars 10mm, tees 10mm, fairways 14mm and rough 55mm. We try to do a light verticut on greens every 2-3 weeks but, if we get it done once a month, I am OK with that.”

“Presentation is important. Whilst we don't have too much striping in the fairways, approaches and rough, we obviously like the course to be very presentable and tidy.”

“End of season renovations generally



Hole 13 in late October



During the winter months we groom a cross country ski trail through the course that is free to use for club members



revolve around adding additional drainage. Although, I do hope to start undertaking bunker renovations this autumn, as a lot of our bunker sand is old and contaminated. Currently, after a lot of rain, our bunkers have a hard time draining."

I was keen to find out about the climate challenges Paul faces. "The biggest challenge is the changing weather patterns and the later onset of winter. Usually, November is quite dark and chilly, however,

over the past few years, the weather has been quite mild - making for increased disease pressure. This is often the case in December as well. Keeping an eye on the greens during the off season is much more important now, as opposed to several years ago when you could rely on cold weather to prevent disease."

"Fusarium in the fall, winter and spring is always a struggle, but we try to spray as little as possible. Once a year we do have

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In Estonia, when you need to order something (especially parts), you can almost plan on not getting them for close to a week. In Canada, you generally only have to wait a day or two

to spray some herbicides to keep various weeds from taking over tees, fairways and rough areas. We are quite lucky to have very few weeds on our putting surfaces, so we take care of those by hand whenever necessary. We take regular soil samples and the findings show that we have a very low CEC, so we are trying to increase the organic material in our rootzone for better moisture and nutrient retention."

Paul went on to tell me how he got

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Getting Personal

Paul Marley - he's not at all modest ... but he is a legend!

Who are you?

Paul Marley, Head Greenkeeper at The Estonian Golf and Country Club.

Family status. Seven years with a tremendously understanding and patient girlfriend.

Who's your hero and why? My grandparents. They fled Estonia during WWII with nothing and built themselves a new life in a new country (Canada).

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Volunteering at the 2018 Ryder Cup at Le Golf National.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? Thank goodness you haven't lost your devilish good looks or your humbleness!

What job would you love, other than your own? Professional hammock tester.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Answering this question honestly would eliminate any chance of me holding political office!

What is your favourite film? Caddyshack or Animal House.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Nirvana 'Nevermind', Led Zeppelin and the Best of Queen.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Paul Marley: The Man. The Myth. The Legend. Chris Griffin from Family Guy ... so what if he's a cartoon character?

What scares you?
The unknown.



© Kadri Palta Photography

What is your favourite sport? Baseball or ice hockey.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit?

When I finish building my time machine, this question is irrelevant.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

Dave Grohl, George Carlin and Muhammad Ali.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? See it through until the end.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro ProCore 648.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked?

The day after getting 50mm of rain ... "Is the course wet today?"

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Fun-loving, patient and understanding.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper?

Never be afraid to ask a question or make a suggestion. Even an experienced greenkeeper can learn something new from a new team member.

What talent would you like to have? Be more mechanically inclined.



involved in the industry. "I loved the game of golf and I knew that I wasn't somebody who could be an 'office rat' so I needed to work outdoors. I had worked in a ProShop and been an instructor at a children's camp, as well as helping to organise a few community tournaments. However, after about a week of working as a greenkeeper, I knew that I had found something that I could make a career out of. I undertook the Golf Court Technician Programme at Seneca College and worked at Thornhill Golf and Country Club (now The Thornhill Club) in Toronto, Canada."

"I felt there was no room for me to move up at Thornhill and I had always dreamed of living in Estonia, even if for a short while. I had Estonian citizenship, spoke the language and figured being young and single was the ideal time to

make the move. I have now been at the club for ten years."

The biggest difference between Estonia and Canada is the accessibility and speed in which you can get your hands on products. In Estonia, when you need to order something (especially spare parts), you can almost plan on not getting them for close to a week. In Canada, you generally only have to wait a day or two.

Whilst some larger purchases were put on hold throughout Covid-19, Paul was still able to purchase what was required. "I tip my cap to our Club Manager, Hanno Kross, who was able to make sure the greens department got everything we needed despite us having to really tighten our belts.

"For the most part, our club has been relatively unscathed by the pandemic. A couple of the



Early August sunrise



Mowing the 3rd fairway in mid-August

clubhouse employees received positive tests and had to self-isolate, however, by some luck, the greens department has been unaffected. 2020 was the busiest year that the golf course has had; generally we average approximately 25,000 rounds per year, however, last year, we were over 35,000 rounds."

"The past eighteen months has shown how quickly our club has been able to adapt to an ever-changing situation. We would come up with one plan, start executing that

plan then, two weeks later, have to do a total 180. Communication from the maintenance department, to the clubhouse, to the teaching pros was never ending. Everybody helped each other out whenever, and wherever possible."

It wasn't all so positive though as Paul's mental health suffered greatly mid last year. "There were changes in management within the maintenance department, namely me being promoted to head greenkeeper. Being short staffed in the

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We could really do with a whole new fleet of equipment, as a lot of our machines are getting on in years

spring and having to work long hours took its toll on me - both mentally and physically. Again, I give full credit to our club manager for being very understanding and letting me take a week off to regroup in the middle of June. Whilst I did seek medical assistance, I think it was probably more of an issue of being over-tired."

"I knew greenkeepers were a tight bunch before the pandemic, however, in the early months, it was amazing to see how much we were all willing to help each other out. With

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Mowing greens during National Championships

rules regarding golf constantly changing and us having to figure out various ways to keep the courses open and safe, everyone was willing to share ideas. And, by some stroke of luck, Estonia was one of the few countries in the European Union that never had to close its golf courses during the pandemic. I think that is certainly one reason why we had significantly more rounds played in 2020."

With all that behind Paul and the team (hopefully), the future is bright. "Whilst we currently have some issues with our greens, we are starting to deal with those. The progress will be slow and painful, but at least we are moving in the right direction. Due to the low cation exchange capacity, we are starting the process of incorporating more organic material into the rootzone - along with other soil amendments."

"To date, we have cleared a lot of underbrush next to many fairways and greens to increase sunlight and airflow. However, the major undertaking has been adding drainage throughout the golf course.

Many areas in the rough are very wet and, in the spring and fall, we spend a week or two adding drainage."

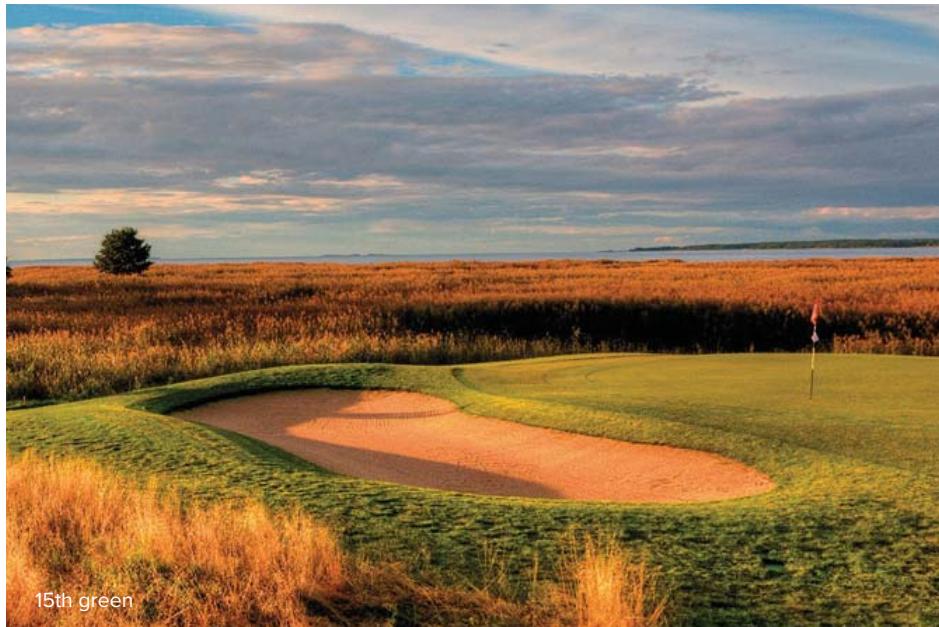
"Whilst undertaking any projects, I think it's really important to communicate what we are doing to our members. I am very active on social media (Facebook and Instagram), where I regularly share photos of what is going on within the greenkeeping department. The club also has a newsletter that gets sent out ideally once a week, but definitely every 10-14 days."

Paul added: "We could really use a whole new fleet of equipment, as a lot of our machines are getting on in years. Our equipment is all the colours of the rainbow ... some orange Jacobsen, a few green John Deere and red Toro. As long as we keep replacing a piece of machinery every so often we should be okay. Our most recent purchases have all been Toro. Last year, we purchased a Campey TB 220 brush. It was constantly in use during March and April (to help stand the turf up after a snowy winter)

The past eighteen months has shown how quickly our club has been able to adapt to an ever-changing situation. We would come up with one plan, start executing that plan then, two weeks later, have to do a total 180



Clubhouse



and we have used it to brush in topdressing. It is a fantastic piece of kit!"

I was keen to get Paul's opinion of the industry from a European perspective. "I think the greenkeeping industry overall is in good shape. However, we do need to worry about encouraging the next generation of greenkeepers. I am far from old (37 years old), but in Estonia, I don't see any younger people getting into the industry or considering it as a career. For the most part, it seems like people are getting involved in greenkeeping just as a job - with no real interest in becoming a trained

and qualified greenkeeper. They need to see that there is more to greenkeeping than just your own golf course, and that if you are a trained and qualified greenkeeper, you have the opportunity to work anywhere around the world."

"It doesn't help that we are undervalued... All we do is cut grass, right? What can be so difficult? What a lot of golfer's don't understand is just how much goes into growing turf. Grass is not meant to be grown at 3-4mm and have over 100 people walking on it every day. Getting golfers to understand the stresses that the turf is under

Presentation is important.

Whilst we don't have too much striping in the fairways, approaches and rough, we obviously like the course to be very presentable and tidy

on a daily basis is a never-ending battle."

"The 'Thank a Greenkeeper' initiative organised by BIGGA, FEGGA and the GCSAA I think was a great idea. Now, we have to build on that. Making sure golfers know who the head greenkeeper is at your golf club is also very important."



**ESTONIAN GOLF
&
COUNTRY CLUB**



Silloth on Solway Golf Club

Life of Brian

Silloth on Solway Golf Club is one of the best hidden golfing gems in England. Situated on the Cumbrian coast, the course is blessed with stunning views of the Galloway Hills to the north, south to the Lakeland fells and, in the distance, the Isle of Man. Lee Williams met with **Brian Story**, the club's Course Manager who has been carefully manicuring the course to perfection for nearly forty years



From a young age, Brian knew what career path he wanted to take when leaving school in 1983. He believes he is one of the few at that age who actually thought about being a greenkeeper; so much so, he told the careers officer that was what he wanted to do. His mother had other ideas and wanted him to work with his older brother, who was a manager at a cellophane factory. "I ended up going there on a YTS scheme at the back end of eighty-three, and I spent all winter hating the job (although I did meet the Duke of Edinburgh when he visited on the company's fifty year celebrations). It was a good education though as I got to see what life is like in a factory, and it made me even more determined to follow my chosen career path."

I asked Brian how he discovered greenkeeping and how he got his first job? "When I was twelve years old, I had a mate

who was a nine-handicap golfer, and he introduced me to the game. Also, I was always interested in how the pitches were presented when I watched football matches like the FA Cup on TV. My first passion though (at sixteen), was to be a professional golfer but I realised pretty quickly that I did not have the nerve."

"A job came up here at Silloth, and my mum still wasn't keen about me wanting to pursue a career in greenkeeping. There was very little money in it at that time, and the club was not doing very well and was in the red. They had borrowed money for the original irrigation system in 1979 and were struggling to pay it off."

Despite concerns from his mother and the club's lack of funds, Brian took the opportunity to join the greenkeeping team. He quickly realised there was no actual structure in place, especially when it came to the training of staff. "I wanted to go to

Elmwood College who were advertising courses in sportsturf, but I could not convince the club to send me as they did not have the money and, at that time, it meant seven weeks away from work. It eventually took me four years to convince them to allow me to enrol at the college/complete the course, and that was thanks to a schoolteacher who was on the committee. I told him what I wanted to do and, in the end, they let me carry out a distance learning course in supervisory/management provided by Elmwood College."

"I worked hard to show what I could do, and I achieved the second student award; this convinced them investing in training was the right way to go. You could say I then took a step backwards and did three years at Elmwood and gained my National Certificate. In all three of those years, I was nominated for top student of the year. This led to me being nominated for the Toro



Student Greenkeeper award in my second and third years, where I got to the finals each time. At the second attempt, I won it and, at the same time, I was made course manager in 1991."

Once out on the pure links course, you could be mistaken for thinking you are in the middle of a traditional straight out straight back course in Scotland. I was taken aback by the stunning views throughout the course. "The inward back nine is slightly more heathland with a bit more heather whilst, on the seaward front nine, the soil is slightly more alkaline, making it a more of a pure links."

Brian tells me they have used the STRI



in the past to provide agronomic advice, but have managed well without their advice since parting company with them in 2016 when Alistair Beggs left. But now, he feels it is the right time to look at getting them back involved. "The main reason for this is for the passing on of information to the club and its members regarding the reduction in contact fungicides and the revocation of Chlorpyrifos, which are massive issues for us. In particular, the leatherjackets in this area which have always been prolific. Personally, I do feel we are being let down by our governing bodies such as BIGGA, Golf England and the R&A. They should be doing more to help us; many greenkeepers are suffering up and down the country."

I see many greenkeepers on social media platforms using silage sheets on their greens to encourage the leatherjackets to the surface. I asked Brian if this was something he would consider carrying out. "I do not see it as a long-term viable option. If we do have to go down that route, then we would have to look at closing the course for a couple of days when the weather is right. But on a windy links course, it would prove

challenging to keep the sheets down. And it's only a short-term measure in my eyes."

"The whole thing worries me, and the webinar that BIGGA put on the other week did not answer many of our questions. Guys like me have been reliant on these products for all of their careers and used to seeing the control they gave. To then think, at this stage in my career, I have to accept there will be a lack of standards compared to what we have produced before is tricky to get your head around."

"No matter how much you educate your committee and those members who will stand in front of you and ask the questions, the vast majority of golfers are simply not interested in any reasoning, never speak up and just watch championship golf on Sky Sports over the weekend, then expect the same standards when they play their local course on a Monday. Unless the likes of Sky Sports who, let's be honest, are not interested in educating golfers, were to explain why these courses look so pristine compared to their local course, we will never get this information out to the broader world."

I understand where Brian is coming from. Our industry faces many issues at this present time, and it is alright for us to scream and shout about problems with pay, finances, recruitment and working hours, but all this is done through social media channels related to the sports turf industry. Unless we can get the big sports broadcasters to set aside some time before an event to speak to the groundsmen and greenkeepers about the challenges they face, to help educate those who think we just cut grass for a living, unfortunately this will always be the case.

Brian makes a fair point. "I would like to see someone come out and tell us what they are doing on an Open Championship venue that has the potential to be affected in the year they host a championship. They cannot afford for one piece of grass to look out of place. If they are having the same problems and they have figured out a way to prevent or deal with the situation, it would be helpful for them to get it out in a magazine so we can all benefit from their ideas."

Greens construction is varied around the course - many of them were built around





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A job came up here at Silloth, and my mum still wasn't keen about me wanting to pursue a career in greenkeeping

the turn of the 20th century with one or two constructed just after World War Two using the Dew Pond Method, so they are clay-lined, which causes Brian some problems at times. In recent years, they have reconstructed two of the greens in-house. "To help relieve our issues on the Dupont greens, we have used the Robin Dagger regularly to help get through the clay; it has done a great job. We have rebuilt two of the greens to a modified USGA rootzone on top

of dune, so we have put more fines in there to help slow the movement of water down a bit."

"In 2004, we did the tenth green, and put the old turf back on, and in 2007 we did a complete movement of the fifth green, so that one was seeded. But in both cases, we have struggled to get any real root growth through the specified rootzone as it has been so inert. On the tenth, where we put the turf back on, it started in a low way

because it was all meadow grass, but we have managed to get more bent grasses into the sward. The fifth we seeded with a fescue/bent mix, but not a lot of the bent came through, so we ended up with a lot of fescues and then, after two or three years, the meadow grass really caused a problem with the mosaic effect. It's taken quite a few years to get the surface to a point where it has got a good mixture of bent/fescue, and the meadow grass is mixed in amongst it."



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THE TEAM

Graeme Henderson - Assistant Course Manager

Graeme is currently in his 16th year working at the club. As a two handicap golfer as a teenager, he decided to work on the course and quickly decided to pursue a career. Through an apprenticeship, he completed his Level 2 and 3 in golf/sports studies through Myerscough plus spraying and chainsaw qualifications. He also holds a ILM Level 3 qualification.

His eye for detail and practical abilities are of the highest order and he is very capable of heading into course management.

Graham Allen - Mechanic/Greenkeeper

Graham comes from an agricultural background; twenty years in farming, followed by a few years as a plumber, means he brings with him a wide range of knowledge. He thrives on new challenges and can turn his hand to most things. Since starting with the club, he has taken on the role of mechanic and uses the internet to learn a great deal about a wide range of machinery issues.

Graeme Teasdale - Greenkeeper

Graeme has been an assistant greenkeeper at a couple of local clubs for six years. He has recently joined the team at Silloth and, in a short time, is proving to be a very popular, proficient greenkeeper who is always keen to learn and gives valuable input into discussions. He has Level 2 Greenkeeping and Level 3 Horticulture qualifications.

Colin Todd - Greenkeeper/Labourer

Colin has been with the club since 2013. He is very much an old school labourer who undertakes his work in a timely manner, allowing the qualified greenkeepers to carry out the more technical tasks.

Spencer Irving - Apprentice

Spencer is a local lad who started working for the club two years ago. It has been a difficult time to be an apprentice, but Spencer is a popular member of the team and has progressed a great deal. He is nearing his end point assessment and says he cannot wait to become a qualified greenkeeper. He is keen to carry on his learning, loves the job and the club have high hopes that he will develop into an invaluable member of the team.

John Johnston - Apprentice

John has worked at the club for four years; part-time in the pro shop, whilst continuing his education. This has given John a great insight into the demands of the golfer and sometimes this is difficult to teach apprentices. He joined the greenkeeping team this year and believes he has made a great career choice. The aim of the club is to allow John to achieve his full potential through the education system and through on site practical training. He is doing some great work and has great potential.

Tony Fielding - Part-time Greenkeeper (Retired Head Greenkeeper from a local course)

As a life-long greenkeeper, Tony retired in 2016. As a member of Silloth, he volunteered for sand patching and as a result was talked into returning to part-time work to help out. The skills and knowledge he brings are proving to be invaluable by helping the younger members of the team.



Brian talks me through the seasonal maintenance of the greens. "Cutting heights depend on the weather; if we get a severe winter, then the height of cut can be as high as 6mm. If it's a mild one and the grass keeps growing, we will stay around 5mm. I do not like to go below 4mm as a rule in the summer, but if they need to be a little quicker, then I will drop the height to 3.75mm. We cut with the John Deere 2500 greens mower throughout the season as the greens remain firm all year round. In winter, we will cut when necessary, and in summer, we cut every day."

"When we verti-cut, we will carry out two passes in different directions using the GreenTek Thatchaway units on one of the older John Deere 2500's. Again, this is a process we will carry out when I feel it is required.

Sometimes we will do it every few weeks, and then, in some years, we can go the whole season without verti-cutting. Last season, we put stiff brushes on front of the greensmower instead of the groomers, and I have found using the brushes has reduced the need to verti-cut. It is helping to keep the grass a little bit finer, and they do not put as much stress on the plant as the groomers do, so it's a win for us."

"We will overseed the greens at least once a season. The regularity rates at which we seed depends on how much play there is and the available time. We will double pass with the sorrel rollers, then overseed with a mixture of Browntop Bent using the speed seeder. When choosing seeds, I will always opt for the top cultivars. For the last few years, we





If the club was going to spend a substantial amount of money, we should get an independent consultant to redraw the plans, with the instruction to make it future proof

have been using Arrowtown, but this year we have gone with Barenbrug's All Bent with Charles and Barking, as Charles has come out head and shoulders above the rest in the STRI seed trials."

Aeration of the greens would typically depend on how Brian feels the greens are playing and their health. But, lately, he has started to back away more and more from aeration processes because of the issues they face with leatherjackets. "It is pretty well known now that leatherjackets eat around the aeration holes, making it more or less impossible for the holes to grow in until they are gone. Glen Kirby, Technical Manager for Syngenta, used the term 'they are using them as elevators'. This makes it much easier for them to make their way out of the rootzone at night and go back down in the morning. This has certainly made us look at aeration in a different light than what

we did before. In the past, we would have been more regimented in our approach."

"To reduce the amount of compaction happening in the first place, we have started to apply more dressings, so we do not have to carry out any deep aeration, and if we do want to open up the surface, it will just be in the top one or two inches. This year, I have bought the GreenTek slitters, which do not go in that far, helping concentrate aeration in the top and reduce the need to do anything more profound. I have also

purchased a new deeper greens slitter with the aim to reduce verti-drain operations."

The club has recently invested heavily in replacing their old irrigation system. First installed in 1979, the system has been modified over the years to keep up with the modern demands placed upon it. They had taken the system as far as possible and were also being told the PVC pipe was past its best and would only last twenty-five years until they ran the risk of the pipes splitting. "In 2010, the first phase of replacing the system was to remove the old water tank from near the clubhouse, which was mains fed using a tiny pump. A new water tank, pump station and borehole were installed in the middle of the course, which fed two loops; this upgrade immediately made a





I would like to see someone come out and tell us what they are doing on an Open Championship venue that has the potential to be affected in the year they host a championship

massive difference to the reliability of the system but also meant we could pressure the system all the time.”

“The first design for the placement of the pipework and sprinklers was carried out in 2010. This meant that, when we came to carry out the work, the plan was seen to be obsolete, plus the guy who designed it was no longer in the business. In 2019, it was decided that, if the club was going to spend a substantial amount of money, we should get an independent consultant to redraw the plans, with the instruction to make it future proof, and then put this out to tender.”

“Full Circle, who carried out the first phase of the project, provided the best tender, so they got the job. Work started in winter of October 2020, which was fantastic as

there was no one out on the course due to the pandemic, enabling the contractors to get on with the job. All the pipework that has been put in has been sized correctly to irrigate all the greens, tees and fairways if we want to. As part of the installation, we have done one trial fairway on the seventh to show what difference it will make when we get droughts like the one in 2018, which was an eye-opener.”

I asked Brian why he opted to install the Hunter irrigation controller and heads? “It was between Hunter and Toro in the end, and there was not much between them. The thing that made us go with Hunter was down to the research I was doing, and what stood out for me was listening to the Americans who see Hunter’s reliability over Toro, so that was one thing. Also, over the fourteen years, we have been testing all sorts of sprinklers from various manufacturers. We found the smaller sprinklers from Hunter were much more reliable and more robust than the other makes and would run independently without the computer at the time.”

Brian concluded: “We have lost a couple of key greenkeepers in the last twelve months and that always makes things difficult for a while. We are trying to piece together a young and enthusiastic team and the three new members of staff are very keen to make greenkeeping a career, rather than a stepping-stone to other work. The future for Silloth looks very bright.”



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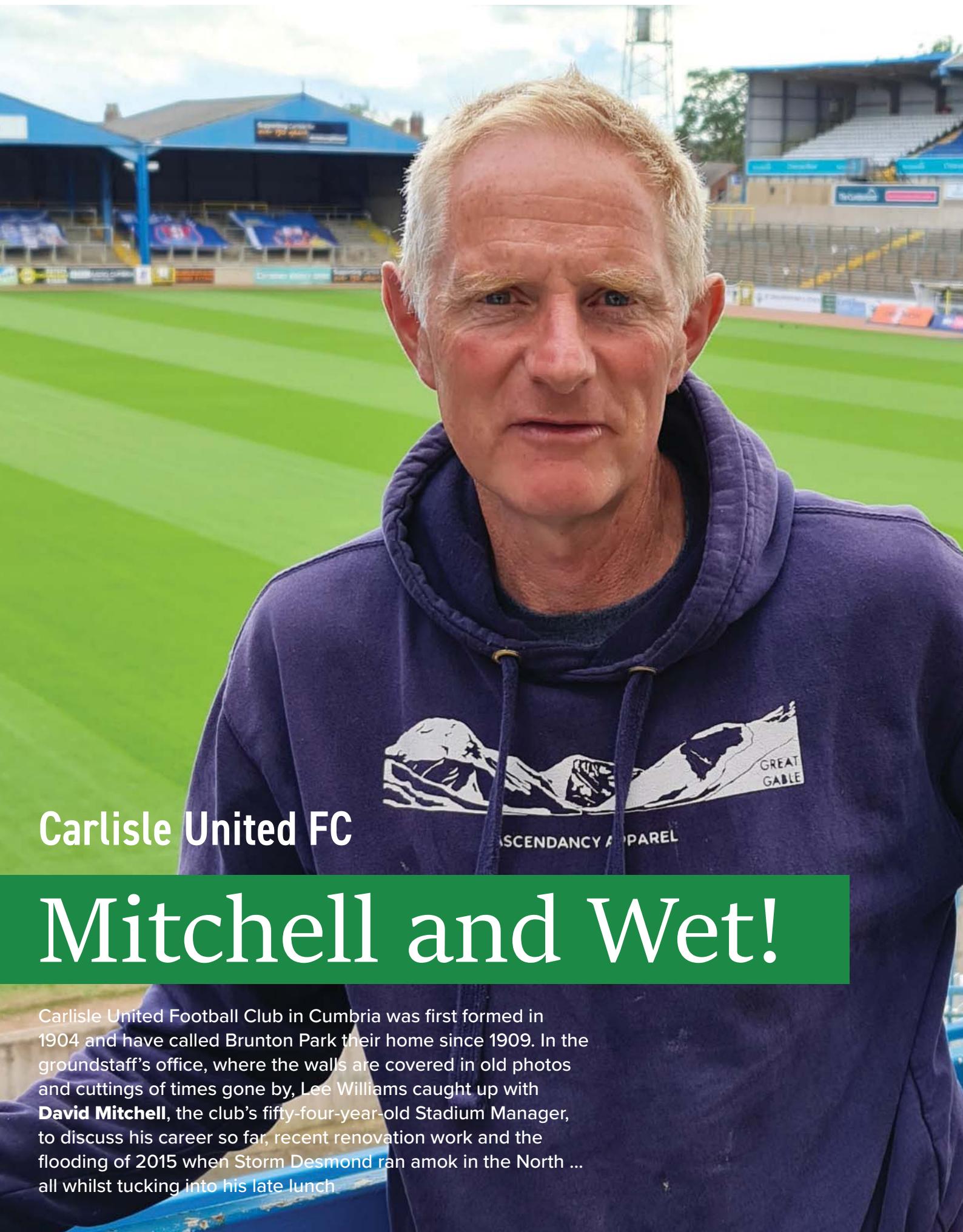
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Carlisle United FC

Mitchell and Wet!

Carlisle United Football Club in Cumbria was first formed in 1904 and have called Brunton Park their home since 1909. In the groundstaff's office, where the walls are covered in old photos and cuttings of times gone by, Lee Williams caught up with **David Mitchell**, the club's fifty-four-year-old Stadium Manager, to discuss his career so far, recent renovation work and the flooding of 2015 when Storm Desmond ran amok in the North ... all whilst tucking into his late lunch.



//

My philosophy is to keep it simple; I'm not into gimmicks. In the morning I can walk in and I know when the pitch looks like it is about to go over the edge and needs a dose of fertiliser

Carlisle United is situated close to the River Petteril. In 2005, the river burst its banks, and again more recently in 2015 after Storm Desmond rampaged through Cumbria, flooding the stadium and the many homes surrounding it. This left the pitch under several feet of water and caused extensive damage to the club's facilities. I asked David how they got through those situations and how they get play back on the pitch?

"The first one in 2005, when the riverbanks were nowhere near as high as they are now, just inundated the ground with floodwater. The groundstaff at that time, after the water receded, did not take the top off the pitch. From what I can gather, they just put the roller on the back of the tractor and let the silt stick to the roller and cleaned it off at the end of each run. That meant that contamination was still present on the surface for the rest of that season, and the pitch was terrible. The following season, when I took over, the pitch was horrendous; we put some drains in across the pitch every five metres during the close season of 2005, but it was futile with what was happening on the top."

"I remember we had a reserve game, and Joe Hart played in goal for Shrewsbury on Wednesday after we'd had home games on the previous Saturday and Tuesday. There was hardly a blade of grass left on the pitch! One of the board members called me in to 'have a chat' about what we intended to do, not 'there is the door' as I initially feared. So, ultimately, after all that, the pitch was replaced at the end of the season with a Fibresand construction."

I can recall seeing on the news the devastation Storm Desmond caused to Brunton Park and its pitch, with the team having to play their home games at Deepdale, the home of Preston North End. This gave David the time to work his magic on the pitch, and the club to clean up and repair its facilities.

"I will never forget the 5th of December 2015 when the river burst its banks as Storm Desmond raged. The pitch was in tip-top condition that year, and we had just received some excellent compliments the Saturday before the flood from Crawley Town FC."

"Once the water subsided, it was a matter of seeing what had been left behind. Gary Owen from PSD came up on the Monday or





Tuesday and we started to get a grip of what the surface was looking like, the percolation rates, what we could do and if the insurance would cover us. PSD advised us that the grass coverage was pretty much where it should be for that time of year, even after the floodwaters had been on it. However, the volume of water meant that other damage had been caused and it was agreed all-round that the best course of action was to Koro off 15-20mm from the existing surface and re-turf."

"The EFL gave us special dispensation to play three home games away from home and, by 23rd January, we were back playing."

I asked David how much silt the floodwaters had been left behind and if anything had been learned from the first flood in 2005? "It all depends on the

lowest point where the water exits the stadium," he explained. "In the worst areas, we had around a 5mm covering of silt; it would come up around your wellies. It was horrendous. I would describe the texture of it as like chocolate icing; it is peculiar. But, one thing we learned from Worcester CCC, was to use lobster pots or bread baskets and drag them around in the water to churn up the silt as the water subsided, so more of it could be carried away with the water as it goes rather than settling on the pitch."

"The last flood gave us the experience to look at what we did before, and that wasn't much, leaving most of the silt left behind on the surface; every time the pitch was damp, you would leave brown footmarks behind as you walked across it! We had to look at factors like is it any good for players' health, and the answer was no. So, all that

“

I do not aerate the pitch on a calendar basis; I like to react to how the pitch is performing to avoid making the surface too unstable





To adjust that acidity to get it closer to where it should be, we have added some lime to help neutralise it

was factored in; we have been here before, and we probably made a mistake. Given the higher levels of professionalism we now have, that is how we got a re-turf in. Even that was not simple, as there was a shortage of fibre turf in the country to do all of the pitch. So, we had to split it between soil turf and fibre turf, ultimately giving us problems for future renovations."

The Fibresand pitch is now approaching its fifteenth season since being constructed

in 2006 on a gravel carpet with six inches of lower and upper rootzone. David believes the upper rootzone is now around four and a half inches deep with renovation work over the years. Every year, in February, soil samples will be taken to determine the fibre content in the pitch; the results will then determine what is required when renovating the pitch at the end of the season.

David was highly commended in the EFL Grounds Team of the Year Awards

2020/2021 for League Two for his efforts in maintaining the pitch in what has been a challenging year for many. It is renovation time again, and David is often asked why an award-winning playing area needs to go through this process, particularly when the club is managing costs across the board.

"It is a fair question, but what we've got to be careful of is that what fans see on the top, when they watch the games being played, is one thing, but all sorts is going



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Getting Personal

David Mitchell - he loves the smell of shoe polish and gets the job done!



Who are you? David Mitchell, Head Groundsman at Carlisle United FC.

Family status. Married to Kathryn with two daughters; Katie (28) and Elizabeth (24).

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Getting the pitch back to a playable condition in January 2016, after floods in the city left the ground under 8ft of water.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? You've achieved a lot in your career.

Which famous people wind you up? Claudia Winkleman and Alan Shearer.

What job would you love, other than your own? Looking after war graves.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Smashing my head off the side of a swimming pool, whilst wearing flippers on a lesson ... at the age of 36!!

What is your favourite film? Home Alone 1 (keep the change ya filthy animal).

What scares you? Snakes!

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Get Off The Pitch with Clint Eastwood.

What is your favourite sport? Cricket.

What's your favourite smell? Shoe polish.

What would you cast into Room 101? Dog owners that don't pick up and drivers that brake when the lights are on green.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Richie Benaud, Bob Mortimer and Jeff Lynn.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Just do your job!

What's your favourite piece of trivia? It's an eight mile walk to cut the Brunton Park pitch.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Out of the Blue (ELO), The Big Wheel (Runrig) and What You See Is What You Get (Luke Combs).

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Is that grass artificial?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Dennis G860.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Hard-working, loyal and impatient.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson? Watch, look, listen and learn.

What talent would you like to have? To play the piano.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Make professional football a "ball in play" 60 minute game.



on underneath. If we want to provide the best kind of surface, sometimes we have to accept that additional work must be done, which obviously comes at a cost. In terms of what we are doing now, it's a bit of a longer-term fix rather than something that won't last too long, but if you had the budget, you'd probably do it every year."

Before planning out exactly what renovation work should occur this season, David took a look at the Fibresand content results and had some soil tests carried out. Once all the data was analysed, it turned out the pitch's pH levels were too acidic, and it also needed topping up with fibre.

"In places across the pitch, it is pH4, and ideally, we need it to be around pH5.5 to ensure we have a healthy ryegrass

sward. With the weather we had and the lack of grass cover, I could see that the grass we did have wasn't enjoying its environment anyway."

"To adjust that acidity to get it closer to where it should be, we have added some lime to help neutralise it. To get the lime in, we had to plough it up, which is pretty much what a farmer does when he turns the soil over in a field before planting the next crop. We have also added a trace element package with magnesium, boron, manganese, and all kinds of things like that."

When I arrived at the club, renovation work had been completed, and the pitch was looking like it had a great take and was well on its way. David talks me through this renovation process.

"The first thing was to remove





the top 10mm with the Koro; it did not need too much off as we have managed to keep it clean over the last few years. The next phase was to get it cultivated and add in the 1.2 tonnes of lime, trace element package, slow-release fertiliser and 87 tonnes of Fibresand concentrate required to help maintain the durability of the surface. This gives us a concentrate across the pitch of 0.3%, which is okay, and it is a little bit closer to where we want to be. To put it totally

back in proportion, we would have gone for 312 tonnes, but obviously budget comes into it, so we can only chip away at it bit by bit."

"It took three cultivations to get it nice and mixed and a bit of handwork around the sprinklers. From there, we used a stone rake machine to level it up before rolling. Finally, the pitch was overseeded using GG22 Premier pitch renovation, a perennial ryegrass mix that includes Eurocordus, Europitch and Erosport, using a dimple



The take on the seed has been excellent this year, taking around five days, which is probably a record



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I will never forget the 5th of December 2015 when the river burst its banks as Storm Desmond raged. The pitch was in tip-top condition that year



seeder. In addition to this, I like to randomly run over with our SISIS Variseeder 1300 and the fertiliser spreader to make sure the space between the drills have been filled in, ensuring even coverage."

"The take on the seed has been excellent this year, taking around five days, which is probably a record. It is so much easier for the seed to germinate after a turnover instead of going straight in after a Koro off, like you have to do on a Desso pitch, for example."

David is happy with the pitch so far, but now comes the hard work of getting the surface established and maintaining it throughout the season. "Once we have got the turf established, we will cut the pitch at 25mm for the start of the season with the Dennis G860. After a game, I will go over with the rotaries to pick up any debris rather than use the brush attachment on the G860, which tends to be a bit too harsh. I can never get enough time to verti-cut the pitch and I tend to find that, when I have done, it tends to knock the pitch back a bit and creates a lot of dead matter that doesn't go into the box of the reel, so it makes me

wonder what I am achieving. I believe regularly going over with the rotaries with the fixed brushes on the front helps keep the surface clean."

"I do not aerate the pitch on a calendar basis; I like to react to how the pitch is performing to avoid making the surface too unstable. When we do aerate, the maximum depth we can go is six inches to make sure we do not hit the irrigation pipes. We have a Toro ProCore with 19mm tines and we will always vary the depths to avoid creating a pan."

"The pitch is marked out with strings for every game using a Fleet Kombi Marker and Super C marking paint which I have used for many years."

David tells me his fertilising regime is flexible and is pretty similar year on year. "I like to start with an application of ICL Greenmaster Pro-Lite NK 12:0:12, followed by ProLoNg with 25% slow release it also helps kick it on. Then, depending on the weather, I move onto ICL Greenmaster Pro-Lite Double K 7:0:14 in October through to December if it is warm enough. If not, I will switch to ICL Greenmaster Pro-Lite



The pitch was overseeded using GG22 Premier pitch renovation





Invigorator 4:0:8; then, once the weather warms back up around March, I will switch back to the Double K."

"Occasionally, I will apply GS Consolidate Plus and GS Bio Carb when we have a run of games coming up and the pitch looks like it is running out of gas. It helps pep it up, so then it comes out of those games on a sound footing. My take on it is you have to peak it for a match for the visual aspect, and it will come out of that game with a bit of a

kick to help it recover."

"My philosophy is to keep it simple; I'm not into gimmicks. In the morning I can walk in and I know when the pitch looks like it is about to go over the edge and needs a dose of fertiliser."

The club owns most of its machinery, but they also have a sponsorship deal with Rickerby, their local machinery dealer. "They supply us with an Iseki TLE 3400 compact tractor for spraying, front loader work and

heavier duties. Also, a Jacobsen Tri-King 1900-D triple mower and a golf buggy; the rest of the machinery is ours. Most of the equipment is serviced by Rickerby's, but we also have locally sourced mechanics who we can call upon."

From a young age, David always had an interest in turf. He would cut the lawn at home and even take the mower down to the local village green to cut a cricket strip out. When leaving school, his dad wanted him



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**In places across the pitch,
it is pH4, and ideally,
we need it to be around
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to follow in his footsteps and become an accountant, but that was not the career path he wanted to take. "After leaving school, I visited the careers adviser who knew me well. She suggested I took a National diploma at Myerscough College but, when I looked into it, I needed twelve months of practical experience to enrol."

This did not stop David from wanting to follow his dream of working in the sportsturf industry. So, being proactive, he started to apply for positions at local golf clubs, nurseries, schools and sports clubs. "Luckily, Brampton Golf Club, nine miles east of Carlisle, offered me a place

on their greenkeeping team to gain some experience. I was paid £20 a week. Ten months later, a full-time position for an assistant greenkeeper came up at the club, so I applied for it and got it. I stayed at Brampton for sixteen years, working my way up to Deputy Head. The club was kind enough to let me carry out my qualifications up to NVQ Level 3 and my spraying certificates at Newton Rigg, our local college that has now sadly closed. It was a great course, and I helped make many improvements."

"I then moved to Eden Golf Club, which was a newer course with lots of young trees and was maturing at that time. It had many problems, which I believe I helped overturn in the five years I spent at the club, before moving to Carlisle United FC as Head Groundsman in April 2005."



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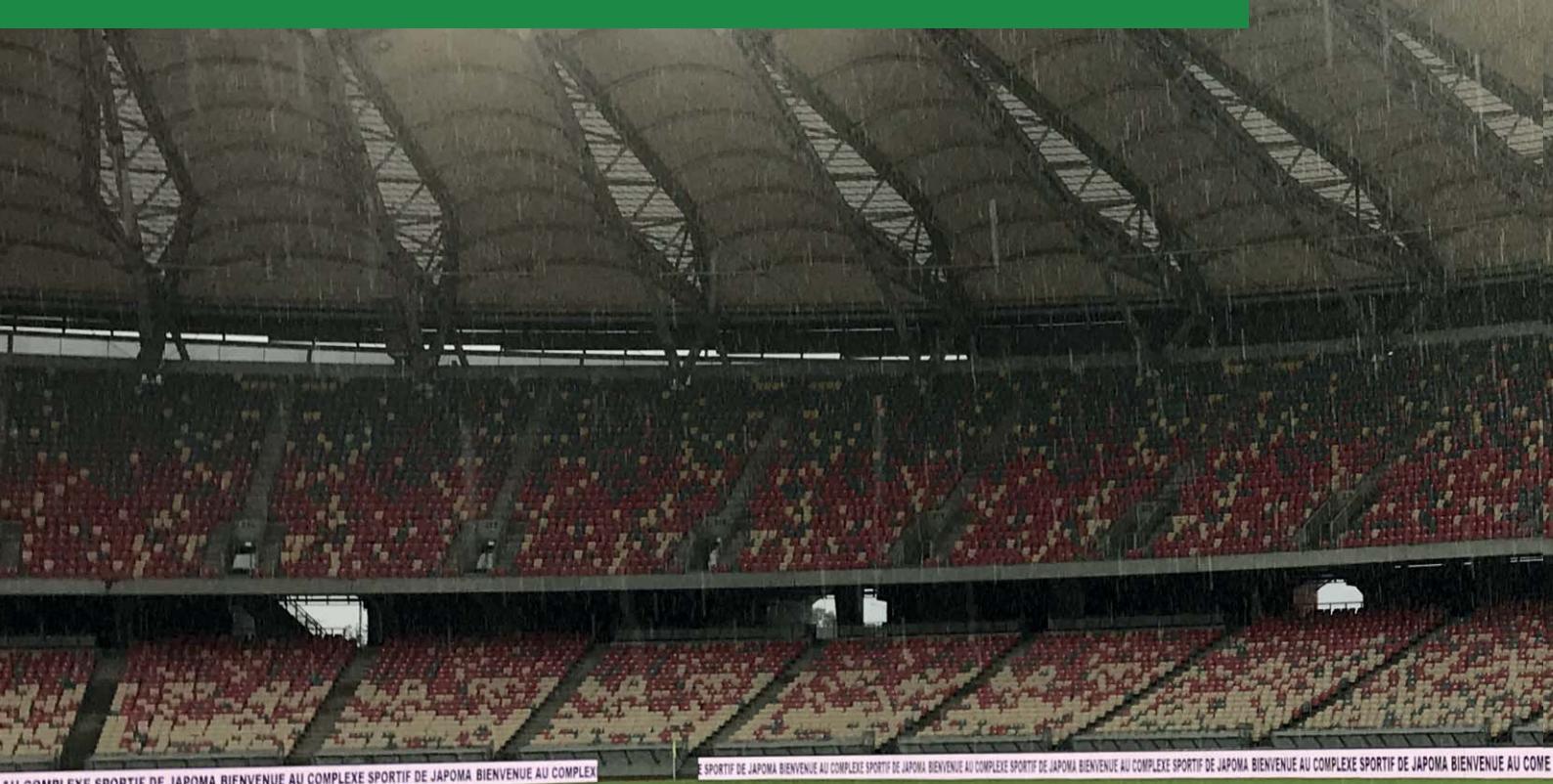


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FIFA Update

Working with the new normal



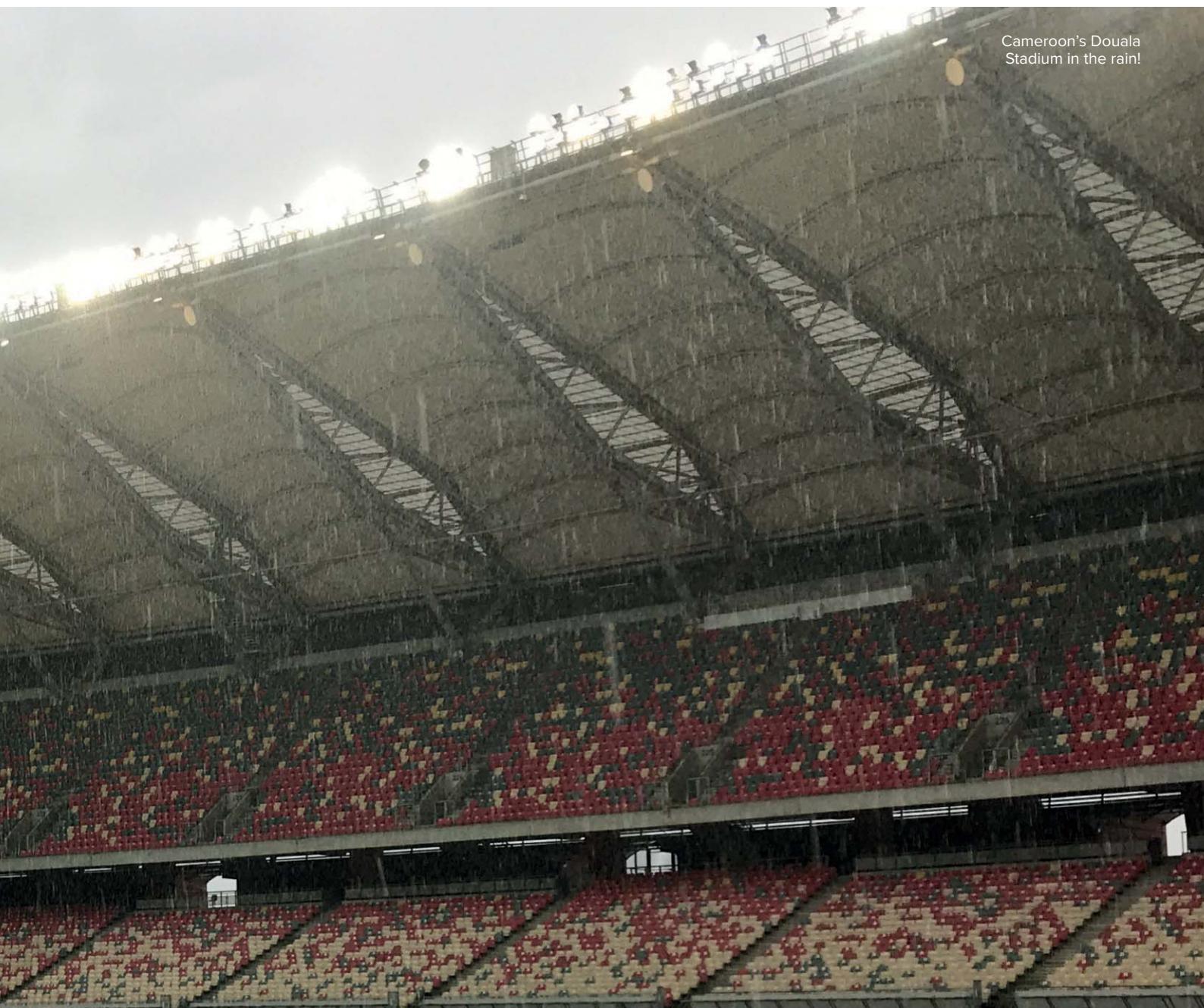
AU COMPLEXE SPORTIF DE JAPOMA BIENVENUE AU COMPLEXE SPORTIF DE JAPOMA BIENVENUE AU COMPLEXE

Six months on from the last FIFA Update, Blair Ferguson talks with the world governing body's Senior Pitch Management Manager, **Alan Ferguson**, about the recent regional tournaments that were impacted by COVID-19, and the up and coming 'world' tournaments due to be held over the coming months and years

Since the last update from FIFA's senior pitch management manager, Alan Ferguson, world football has started to open up again with several tournaments being staged worldwide, and with all of them having to operate within the confines of the new normal. The recently delayed Euro 2020, which celebrated sixty years of the European Championships, was staged in nine countries across the continent, culminating in the final at Wembley. The Olympic Football Tournament, delayed from 2020, was set to be held in Tokyo, whilst South America (CONCACAF) held the Copa America in Brazil with the North Americans hosting the Gold Cup (CONMABOL).

It's fair to say all of the tournaments staged have been impacted by the global covid-19 pandemic, with some being played with fans and others behind closed doors. One of the main concerns for all those involved in hosting tournament football has been dealing with the varying Covid-19 regulations from country to country, which is very much part of the new norm.

Valuable lessons were learned in 2020 from UEFA's staging of the Champions League and Europa League - one of the first international football competitions to be staged in lockdown. Players and officials were moved around in bubbles, which protected them and kept them away from potential infections. The Premier League



Cameroon's Douala Stadium in the rain!

also restarted at the same time and introduced a rigorous testing regime. For Alan, the lessons learnt during these initial events helped shape the staging of these major tournaments.

"All the lessons learned are being used in the tournaments being staged this year, and that has allowed football to take place around the world. The one big unknown is no one knows when things will get back to normal as the world will vaccinate at different rates, and that's something I've seen whilst travelling over the last four months."

"Those countries that have been able to vaccinate larger percentages of their population have started to allow fans back

in, and that has been a great thing for the game because it has missed them, and stadiums have had a very different feel without the fans. I am a fan myself, and the game needs fans to bring the stadiums to life on match day. Players and managers will tell you without fans; the game is simply not the same."

Whilst the 2021 tournaments have been taking place, the planning for 2022 has gone into full swing. Since Qatar in February, Alan has visited Cameroon, inspecting stadia and training pitches to be used in the 2022 Africa Cup of Nations, been on a five-week inspection to Australia and New Zealand for the Women's World Cup in 2023 and supported the Federation in Benin to

stage the CAF version of the Champions League. At the time of writing this article, he was three days away from going out to Japan to deliver the Olympic Football Tournament.

One of FIFA's current projects is to support and build the game in the African region. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has fifty-four full member associations and two associate associations, making it the biggest of the six confederations that make up FIFA. In May this year, Alan was part of a FIFA delegation which visited Cameroon to assess the tournament's proposed stadium pitches and training sites.

“Before any inspection can get underway



I'm fortunate to work for a very specialised global organisation that has a dedicated team of travel specialists on hand 24/7 to offer advice



in the new normal, all the covid-19 protocols have to be met for the country or countries that will be crossed or visited on the trip," Alan explains. "For the Cameroon inspection, that meant taking the pre-flight PCR test 72 hours before departing from London, taking into account the change of flights in Paris. The PCR test has to be valid on arrival at your final destination, which requires careful calculation to account for the time difference."

"I'm fortunate to work for a very specialised global organisation that has a dedicated team of travel specialists on hand 24/7 to offer advice and, if the re-start of travel has been challenging for the various functional area teams doing the visits, it's nothing compared to what the travel team have to contend with."

Once in Cameroon, Alan began the job of evaluating the stadia and training sites proposed for the tournament. The visits to the host cities of Yaounde, Douala, Garoua, Baffoussam and Limbe is the first step in

building the pitch project. Alan has previous experience of Africa, having been part of the SIS team that delivered the pitches in Angola for the same competition in 2010.

"When you see the challenges that fellow groundsmen have to contend with in trying to do the same jobs we take for granted in the UK, you realise how lucky we are," Alan explains.

"Even the simplest of tasks such as linemarking can be quite testing. One of the biggest challenges is getting the right quality of paint and equipment to apply it. So, where needed, we send out FIFA linemarking kits, some of which will be going to Cameroon with wheel to wheel markers. We've also supplied a Dennis G860 through FIFA Forward and provided training and education to the team that will be beneficial to them for the tournament and, hopefully, they can pass those skills and knowledge on to others."

"The support being given to the 2022 African Cup of Nations will be a more

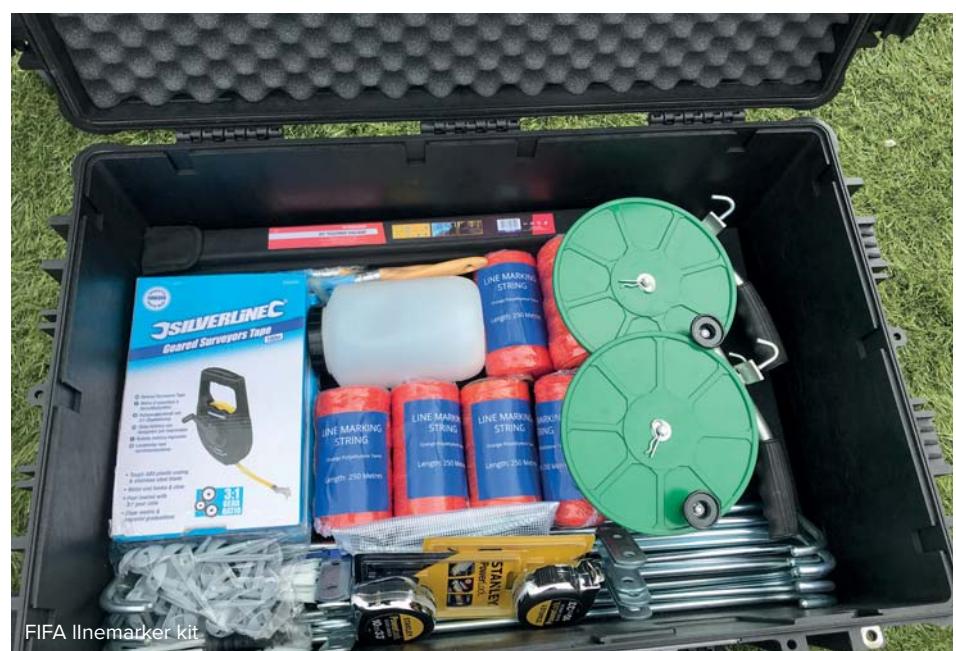
complicated affair. Whilst CAF has run tournaments before, there is a desire for them to improve the quality of infrastructure used to host the tournaments, which for us are the pitches. One of my five key objectives set when joining FIFA back in September 2018 was to try and literally begin to get all the tournaments across the six confederations on to a level playing field in pitch quality and provision. This on its own is a considerable task and, along with several of the FIFA functional areas who would regularly work together to deliver the tournaments across the world, there is now a chance of achieving this."

"The significant advantage of a collaboration like this is that CAF can access the latest tools and technologies that are being used in tournament planning and delivery. Having had the chance to conduct inspections of all the pitches proposed for the tournament, we can now begin putting the actual pitch plan together."

"The week spent in Cameroon was a busy



When you see the challenges that fellow groundsmen have to contend with in trying to do the same jobs we take for granted in the UK, you realise how lucky we are





Stadium Yaounde

one, offering the chance to speak with anyone who is involved in the turf industry. As you can imagine, it's not a big industry like here in the UK, and the leading players are either from the UK, mainland Europe or the USA."

"In this case, it helps to know the main players in the region because it will help to deliver a quick response as time is short. A typical tournament build-up takes anywhere from eighteen months to two years, with

some of the main Tier 1 World Cups taking up to five years to plan."

"We basically have six months to work with, at the end of which we have to have the pitches in a safe, playable and presentable condition. I relish it as a challenge, and it's great to support the Confederations or any member association in this way, and I have told many people it feels like a 40-years plus apprenticeship to take something like this on. I very much see

FIFA as the link in a puzzle bringing all the bits together. Once all the pieces are in place, you see the full picture. That picture for us will be the pitches ready to go for the African Cup."

Work on the planning phase is well underway, with Alan already reaching out to those who can support. Like any tournament, there is a budget, and the starting point is to get to a worst case scenario then work back to a position that is



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acceptable to all parties involved. Alan already knows the worst case scenario and is working with companies based in Cameroon and international partners to get to that ideal place. He expects it to take a couple of months, with dispensation being given for the rainy season.

Following on from the inspection to Cameroon, Alan was part of a delegation of key functional areas that finally managed to visit the selected stadia and training sites for the 2023 Women's World Cup being co-hosted in New Zealand and Australia.

Initially, almost all of the inspections were carried out virtually, with only a few venues visited by the senior delegation, making it a very different process.

"Looking back on the last ten to twelve months, it was amazing the amount of work we were able to do virtually. It allowed the stadia selection to be made without a full inspection, something which has never been done before. I have to give credit to all involved for the honesty and detail that went into the various online meetings allowing a

decision to be made. Happily, now we have been able to make the inspection."

"The team flew to Auckland, New Zealand, having been given special permission from the government to make the visit providing all the covid-19 requirements were met. This meant spending two weeks in managed quarantine at Auckland airport, which is mandatory for now in New Zealand. The team were in two hotels at the airport, and the online banter was brilliant in keeping everyone going. The WhatsApp group was the daily lifeline and the means of effective communication as we were not allowed to exercise together. We took the opportunity to start meeting online with the host cities and host venues, preparing the way for the inspection once the team were released."

"Australia and New Zealand will be a fantastic co-hosting for the tournament and probably one of the best selections for the Women's game at this stage of its global development."

The 2023 tournament will be played in

ten stadia in nine cities and has quite a bit to live up to after the success of France 2019, but Alan is confident that the 2023 finals will surpass the previous edition, despite the success in France.

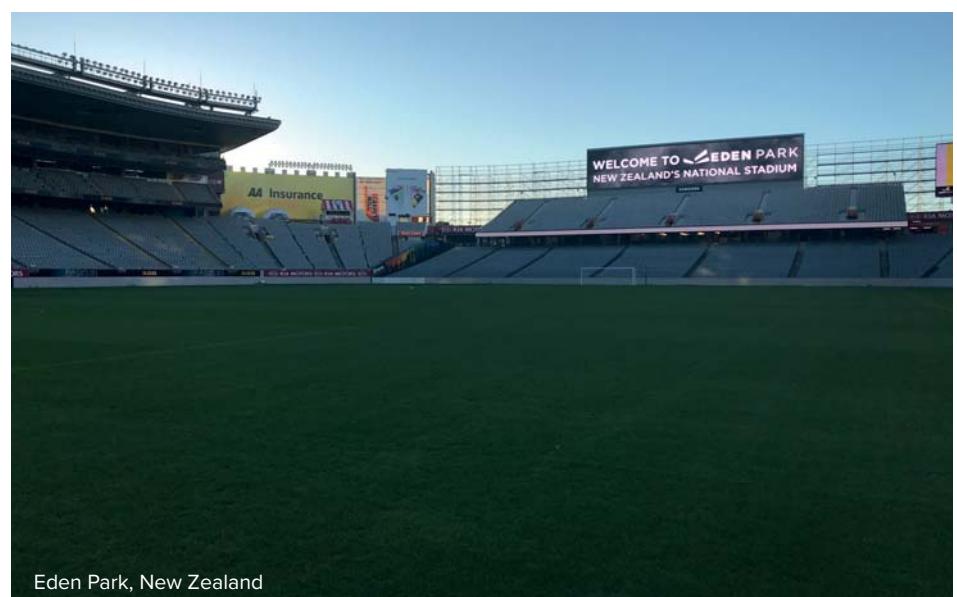
Host stadia in Wellington, Auckland, Hamilton and Dunedin were visited in New Zealand, whilst stadia in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and two in Sydney were visited in Australia.

Similarly to Cameroon, the inspection to Australia and New Zealand was used as a fact-finding trip. The maintenance model in both countries is very much to engage a contractor, with this being more evident in Australia and especially on the training sites. The industry is well established and represented with plenty of equipment suppliers and pitch contractors, which makes Alan confident of successful delivery.

Alan explains: "One big plus is the presence of the New Zealand Sports Turf Institute, part of the Labo Sport group, as the tournament consultant. This already puts us in a strong place by having a presence in



One big plus is the presence of the New Zealand Sports Turf Institute, part of the Labo Sport group, as the tournament consultant





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Looking back on the last ten to twelve months, it was amazing the amount of work we were able to do virtually. It allowed the stadia selection to be made without a full inspection, something which has never been done before

each of the nine cities, which helps us catch up on lost time. Keith McAuliffe from the NZSTI accompanied me for the majority of the tour before some covid-19 changes in Australia forced a change to the schedule. For me, it was not an issue as Keith and the team can pick up venues that I was not able to see first-hand, and these include some of the team basecamp sites in both countries."

After fourteen days at home in Suffolk,

Alan will head to Japan for the delayed Olympic Football Tournament, before the year finishes with the FIFA Arab Cup in Doha, which will be the test event for the 2022 World Cup. It is a big end to the year for the FIFA pitch team as it offers the only chance of a full test in the newly built stadia, but it is a challenge Alan is looking forward to working on with the Aspire Sports Turf Team.



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Brentford Football Club

Bees' Honey of a pitch



Flying high - the Bees on the west London skyline

When Brentford FC won the play-off for a place in the Premier League in May it put them back in the top flight of English football where they hadn't been since the 1946/7 season. Neville Johnson went to the club's impressive new stadium to see how its Head Groundsman **Steve Honey** was set for the challenges ahead

It may be an all too obvious a pun, but there was a real pre-season buzz at the Premier League's newest venue as everyone at one of London's oldest clubs anticipated the 2021/22 season. Curiously, the nickname Bees, beloved by its fans and known across football, doesn't actually stem from the arch pollinator. Back in the 1890s, not long after the club was formed in 1889, students watching a Brentford FC match chanted 'buck up Bs' which was misreported in local newspapers as 'buck up Bees'. It stuck, and has been the

club's badge and affectionate ID ever since.

Steve Honey came to Brentford four years ago as head groundsman at Griffin Park, the club's home since 1904, after several years looking after a number of non-league grounds. He describes himself as a failed sportsman who's made a career out of the next best thing and being close to the action without having to play. He swears he didn't get the job because of his name.

Brentford Community Stadium, which cost £71m to construct, is one of the most significant and exciting developments in the



history of Brentford Football Club. Owner Matthew Benham, himself a lifelong Brentford fan, describes it as the cornerstone of a long-term vision and will help ensure a sustainable future for the club.

Situated next to Kew Bridge station and in the middle of a triangle of railway lines less than a mile away from Griffin Park, the whole 31,000 square metre site is also central to a regeneration plan for the area, which includes more than 900 new homes, a new purpose-built location for Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, and a public square



Steve Honey, Head Groundsman at Brentford Community Stadium

with shops and cafes. Development of the broader plan is ongoing with cranes breaking the skyline surrounding the new stadium.

There had been talk of a relocation for Brentford Football Club for the best part of twenty years and this gathered momentum when Brentford bought the site from Barrett Homes back in 2008 and stated its aim to build a much larger capacity stadium by the 2016/17 season. After approvals for the construction of the new stadium from Hounslow Council, The Mayor of London,

and the Government, it was getting a Compulsory Purchase Order for the remainder of the site that slowed things until September 2016. This was just after London Irish announced that they were actively pursuing a move away from its rented home at Reading's Madejski Stadium to be back in London at Brentford's proposed new stadium. Agreement between the two clubs was reached and the stadium usage application amended and approved. Site clearance work began in March 2017 and construction of the stadium got under way

twelve months later.

On 30th August 2020, the club announced that the Brentford Community Stadium was 'open for business' and ready to host football and rugby.

The first football match at the stadium took place on 1st September 2020 when Brentford hosted Oxford United in a pre-season friendly. The first competitive match was just five days later when Brentford took on Wycombe Wanderers in the first round of the EFL Cup. London Irish played their inaugural match at the stadium on 29th



Hand mowing the stadium's Desso in triplicate

November 2020 when Leicester Tigers were their Premiership opponents.

Only Covid marred the total joy of this watershed in Bees history. At the time Brentford Chairman Cliff Crown said: "It is a real shame that our fans cannot get inside yet, but that day is coming soon, and we are all looking forward to it."

That time is here and 17,250 fans can now get into the Bees new home.

Steve Honey admits he does miss Griffin Park, just like all the fans, but this is an exciting new way ahead for the club and he is relishing it. His set-up is entirely self-sufficient and all the equipment at his disposal is owned by the club. The club's

Operations Director Alan Walsh is his boss for all pitch matters - football and rugby.

Steve's remit is straightforward - to look after not only the Community Stadium pitch, but Brentford's training ground at Osterley, for which demands have risen significantly now the club is in the Premier League. The introduction of hybrid surfaces and the need for a much higher degree of hand cutting is now a must there to give players a consistent feel of Premier League conditions. He has a seven strong team of full-time groundsmen at the moment and the plan is to increase this to nine for the coming season to cover work at both sites.

The stadium pitch is a Desso Grassmaster, the same as the one at Wembley. It was laid by Hewitt Sports Turf and completed its first full season this May for Brentford's successful Championship campaign and London Irish's home fixtures in the Rugby Premiership.

Steve had had experience of hybrid surface management at Griffin Park where a County Turf's Eclipse pitch had done excellent service for a number of

years. The decision to install a Desso was as much as anything governed by the 'double whammy' of Premier League football and Premiership rugby with over thirty matches between August and next May scheduled.

Brentford and its tenant London Irish playing at the stadium would bring huge demands for pitch excellence week in week out. Steve and his team first started working on the new Desso surface, keeping it in trim, before the club moved into the stadium.

"Building site mud and the first period of Covid restrictions made life interesting," he recalls. "We had to do our watering by hand because computerised irrigation had yet to be installed. As for groundsmen with hard hats? I mean, it didn't seem right," he joked.

No football had then been played on it, but Hewitt's returned to do a mini refurbishment last summer ahead of the 2020/21 season.

As we look at the pitch in July this year, a full refurbishment and reseeding of the new surface after a full season of football and rugby action is just five weeks old and it is getting a routine daily trim to 30mm courtesy of a quartet of Dennis Pro34 rotaries.

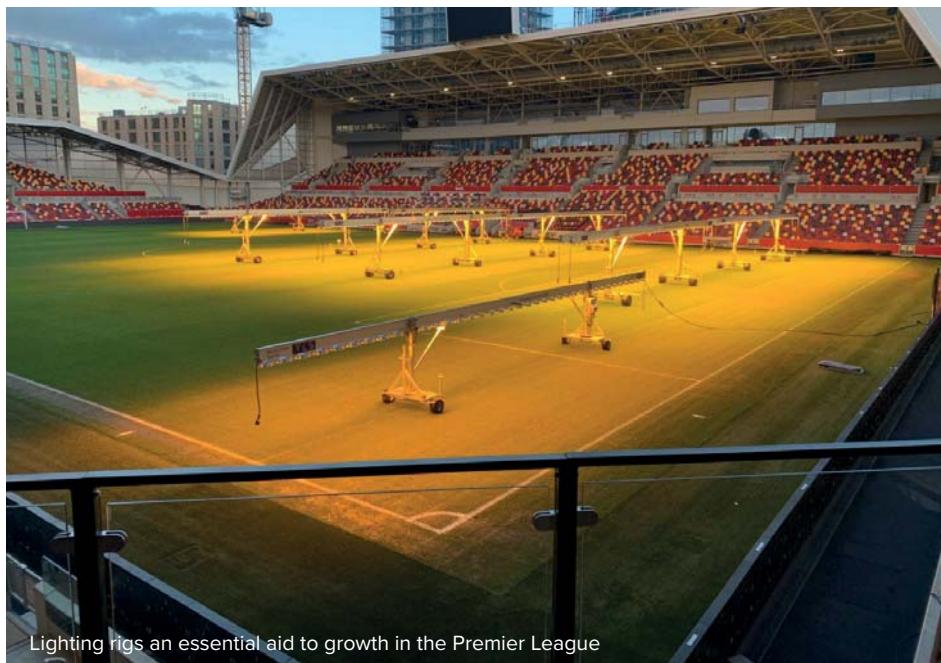
"Hewitt's were on site for less than four days," said Steve. "From Koroing to reseeding, everything went smoothly and the result is a pitch raring to go again at football's - and rugby's - top table."



We had to do our watering by hand because computerised irrigation had yet to be installed. As for groundsmen with hard hats? I mean, it didn't seem right



Steve Honey with the Bees play-off trophy



Sad as it was for all concerned to leave their home of nigh on 120 years, the move to the Community Stadium last August saw a swift turnover from disappointment to triumph for Brentford. The final season at Griffin Park had culminated in agonising play-off defeat at Wembley by, of all clubs, their West London neighbours Fulham. Twelve months later, Manager Thomas Frank's team defeated Swansea at Wembley

2-0 to clinch a place in tier one of English football, a place where the Bees hadn't been for seventy-four years.

Parked up in the car park was a set of TLS 72 lighting rigs, just another reminder that Brentford FC is upwardly mobile.

"We did have smaller rigs at Griffin Park, but these larger, more flexible units make a world of difference to growing conditions at the new stadium," said Steve.

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We did have smaller rigs at Griffin Park, but these larger, more flexible units make a world of difference to growing conditions at the new stadium

"I'm hoping to add ultra violet lights and airflow fans to our repertoire pretty soon."

Steve regularly turns to PSD Agronomy's Dale Frith for advice and expects to be doing lots of 'tweaking' when it comes to the effects of shading, airflow and associated micro-climate issues as conditions change.

For irrigation, the stadium has eight in-pitch heads and sixteen pop-ups around the perimeter, all remotely controlled. "A far cry

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Sumptuous all over cover after just five weeks



from our days of hosepipes, occasional soakings and tinkering with screwdrivers," quipped Steve.

The pitch itself is 105 x 68 metres, in line with most other Premier League venues. For rugby, the try line runs along the football 'six yard' box line. A BeamRider laser marker takes care of the weekly switching from football to rugby and back again, while efficiently turning to green as necessary.

Steve and his team were geared up for a big change in the timing of match day preparation to fit in with the big say Sky and BT have in fixture schedules. Everyone at the club was excited when the Premier League fixtures were announced and the Bees first game was at home to Arsenal, and it was the opening game of the season on a Friday evening in front of Sky cameras. This, Steve admitted, gave him an added tingle, because he is a lifelong Gunners fan. He would, a hundred percent, be more concerned about producing a top-notch pitch than the result, he said convincingly.

The Premiership rugby season kicks off a month after Premier League football, in September. Currently, Brentford is the only Premier League club where rugby is also played. Steve and his team will be preparing over thirty top flight football and rugby pitches in the coming season, not to mention any cup fixtures that come their way.

"The stadium already has one season of hosting both sports under its belt and it went well," said Steve.

"Normally, London Irish play a day or so after the Bees and, often as not, last season's respective games were on Saturday and then Sunday. People often wrongly believe that rugby players cause more disruption to a pitch than footballers. It is quite untrue. Surface disruption is actually about the same."

Steve was clearly relishing being under the spotlight. "It's what gets you up in the morning," he said.

"Nothing has really changed for any of us



Normally, London Irish play a day or so after the Bees and, often as not, last season's respective games were on Saturday and then Sunday



London Irish (in green) in scrum action against Exeter Chiefs at the Brentford Community Stadium last season



The Bees Osterley training ground and one of two Baroness 5-gang mowers

in terms of doing the best we can with the resources at hand. We are the same bunch of decent professionals that did our level best at Griffin Park, but we're now Premier League groundsmen and the stakes are higher, as is the satisfaction."

Brentford's best ever season at the top level was way back in the 1935/36 season when the Griffin Park faithful saw them secure 5th place in the then Football League

Division One. There was excitement and optimism in equal measures ahead of this new venture for the Bees.

They are obviously aiming to be in it for the long haul. Quite a thought as, if they won their first match, they'd be top of the Premier League!



What's in the shed?

At the stadium:

- Dennis G860 mowers and cassettes x 4
- Dennis PRO34 rotary mowers x 4
- Kubota STW40 tractor
- Campey Unirake
- Toro Procore 648 aerator
- Scott's pedestrian spreader
- Team Sprayers pedestrian sprayer
- Fleet BeamRider line marker
- Rigby Taylor IGO line marker
- Tractor mounted sprayer
- TLS72 lighting rigs x 8
- Dew brushes
- Drag brushes

At the training ground:

- Dennis G860 mowers x 4
- Allett RM34 rotary mowers x 4
- John Deere tractor
- Redexim Verti-Drain
- Vredo seeder
- Tractor mounted sprayer
- Tractor mounted spreader
- Sisis Quadraplay
- Sisis Multislit aerator
- Baroness 5-gang mowers x 2
- Wessex Rotary cutting deck
- Fleet BeamRider line marker
- Fleet Combi markers

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Eastleigh Football Club

Drum roll please!



Upgrades to the infrastructure at Eastleigh Football Club's Silverlake Stadium have been followed up by extensive pitch improvements as the club aim to leave the Vanarama National League and push to reach the Football League. Phil Helmyn MG talked to Head Groundsman **Dan Barnes** about the work being undertaken



I met up with Dan Barnes the Head groundsman at the Silverlake Stadium, the home of Eastleigh Football Club, at an extremely exciting (and extremely busy) time for both Dan and the club as extensive upgrades and pitch renovations were well under way.

Like most groundsman, I soon realised Dan's passion and commitment for his job as he talked me through his own journey to realising his dream of being a head groundsman. After leaving school he spent time playing the drums in a UK touring band, building boats and then hovercraft - not something many can claim as a job - before making the move to Eastleigh. Dan started at the club as head of bar and events and held that position for a year and a half, but the desire to be more involved in the pitch was obvious to his bosses. Dan was offered the head groundsman role, a position he has held now for four years. In that time, he has thrown his heart and soul into learning and developing his skills and gained his NVQ level 2 qualification from Sparsholt College in sports turf management in 2017/18 and his spraying certificates in record time.

He appreciates and thanks the help and support he receives from John Wright and Ian Lucas, both head groundsmen at Southampton FC and Bournemouth FC

respectively, as they have always been there when he needs advice. "It's a wonderful industry. All groundsmen are willing to help each other which I find amazing," explained Dan.

The passion was clear to see. Dan remembers being an avid supporter from an early age and recalls volunteering at the club in the school holidays. "I used to tidy up and paint fencing around the pitch as a youngster," he mused. "I just wanted to be involved, I loved (and still love) the club so much."

One of the main reasons for my visit was to see for myself the pitch renovation and chat with Dan to understand the reasons behind the club taking the huge decision and commitment to install a fibre-based pitch.

Dan explained the old pitch failings; "We knew that, because the pitch was built many years ago using local, predominantly clay soil, it would struggle during wet winters and hot summers. The pitch construction led to some incredibly challenging periods, especially in the winter months when rainfall led to continuous waterlogging. The old pitch infiltration rate was approximately 10-20mm per hour, with the new surface expected to drain rainfall up to 350mm per hour, which is an incredible difference."

A brief history

Eastleigh Football Club is a professional association football club based in Eastleigh, Hampshire, England. They currently compete in the National League, the fifth tier of English football, and play their home matches at The Silverlake Stadium which nestles next door to Southampton airport.

The club was formed on 22 May 1946 by Derek Brooks and a group of friends in the Fleming Arms public house in Swaythling, Southampton and originally known as Swaythling Athletic.

The club began playing home matches on Southampton Common when they first joined the league in 1950. In keeping with their early progress, the club moved to a new ground at Ten Acres in 1957 - which remains their home to this day.

In 1980, the club were renamed Eastleigh but were without an official nickname until 2005 when a competition was run amongst the fans and 'Spitfires' was chosen as the famous Spitfire aeroplane was built in Southampton and first flown from Eastleigh Aerodrome, now known as Southampton Airport.

In 2004, the old wooden stand was knocked down and a new 352-seat grandstand was built on the half-way line stretching for just under a third of the pitch which was named the Silverlake Stand. In 2006, the roof was widened across the Silverlake Stand to cover the whole length of the pitch.

Until 2006, the area opposite the grandstand was hard standing but during the summer of 2006, a metal back and roof were added, along with an electronic scoreboard on the roof of the Premier Telecom stand.

In 2009, 150 seats were added to the middle of the Silverlake Stand to give Eastleigh the necessary ground grading to compete in the Conference South play-offs.

In February 2010, businessman Stewart Donald bought Eastleigh F.C. who were then playing in the Conference South League. In May 2017, with the club now one division higher in the National League, he announced that he would repeat his investment of £10 million in the club with the aim of getting them into the English Football League.

True to his word, the investment continued, and the ground was, again, extensively redeveloped during 2014. The East Stand at Sandy Park was rebuilt along the Premier Telecom side of the ground as well as behind the clubhouse goal, providing a covered terraced accommodation for 2,000 spectators. On 2nd December 2014, the newly completed 2,290-seater South Stand was opened for the first time in a Conference Premier game against Dartford, with the club allowing spectators in for free to celebrate the occasion.

In early 2018, the 352-seat grandstand was extended again to bring its capacity to 900 seats. This brought the stadium's capacity to 5,500.

In April 2018, Stewart was chosen to be the leader of a consortium offering to purchase Sunderland, who were put up for sale by billionaire owner Ellis Short. He agreed to sell Eastleigh so that he could own Sunderland and on 21st May, he officially became owner of Sunderland, doing so without the consortium to speed the transaction. The club is now in the possession of Kenny Amor, Tom Coffey and other directors.



"It was extremely challenging trying to keep the pitch in a suitable condition for matches in the depths of winter. I was lucky to have lots of volunteers to help me squeegee water, remove covers and prepare ahead of matches, but sometimes the mountain was too high to climb."

"In the summer, the ageing irrigation system couldn't always cope with the demand, and I'd be out there hand watering with mobile sprinklers. Having said all that, we only lost out on matches on a handful of occasions thanks to the support, hard work and determination of everyone, but we knew we had to do something to improve the pitch and its infrastructure if we wanted to progress as a club. To that end, we were fortunate to secure a 70% grant from the Football Foundation Pitch Improvement Scheme for assistance in the pitch upgrade and, together with the club's 30%, were able to begin work. Even with this amazing monetary assistance, we have been so grateful for the help from our friends at Southampton FC who, when renovating and stripping off

their fibresand training pitch kindly donated the 2,100 tonne spoils to us. We paid for the transport, the 'top up' came from Mansfield Sand."

Work commenced on Monday 24th May in collaboration with main pitch contractors InScapes, overseen by pitch consultant Jonathan Smith of GeoTurf Consulting. As well as the pitch being replaced with the fibresand rootzone, the extensive reconstruction sees a brand-new drainage system, and an upgraded irrigation system installed.

Dan explained; "the new irrigation system will have a huge impact on our ability to maintain the pitch to a high standard. We have installed a full pitch coverage of 16 x Hunter G800 sprinklers around the perimeter of the pitch and a further 8 x i80 heads on the pitch. The i80s will allow us to 'slick' the pitch up on matchdays a lot more quickly and allow a faster surface for the players - something they like. They are all spaced head-to-head to give total coverage which will also help me immensely during the grow-in period."





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I care about it and am excited for its future. Watching the club grow and change over the years has been incredible and I hope we achieve the dream of Football League status

Dan continued; "The seed we have used is Johnsons J Premier Pitch. It's a 100% rye mix using five of the best cultivars on the market at the moment- 20% Eurodiamond, 25% Monroe, 10% Eurocordus, 25% Gildara and 20% Eropitch at a rate of 50gms/m²."

During the grow-in, Dan has been supported by Rigby Taylor with advice on his nutrient inputs and has, and will, use a wide range of products to assist him in his programme which started with an application of 0:24:24 at 80gms/m² at the lower sand level before the fibresand

rootzone was installed.

This was followed by a second application of pre-seed fertiliser ameliorated into the upper rootzone layer using ICL Pearl renovator 11:5:5 at 50gms/m². Dan explained; "Both these applications are designed to really help kick-start the growth. After seeding, I will apply a 6:4:6 containing humic acid feed at 30gms/m² to aid establishment and help maintain the early growth. This is then followed by another granular application of Symbio Caviar organic slow-release fertiliser 10:0:4 at

35gms/m² at second leaf stage to keep the turf 'topped up' with goodness."

"It's important to mention that, in between these granular applications, I am programmed to supplement with a combination of foliar and soil liquid feeds which help the new turf establish at the fastest possible rate. These liquid feeds provide a rich source of carbohydrates, trace elements, seaweed and humic acid. Once I have good growth and I begin cutting, I will follow up the feeds with more conventional application rates of 6:0:18 35gms/m² and a

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foliar 26:0:0 at 40l/ha, coupled with more liquid feeds to 'push on', improve density and help strengthen the sward."

Dan continued; "I only have fifty-one days (from seed going in the ground on 8th July) before we play our first home game against Wrexham!"

Finally, I asked Dan what his aspirations were for the future; not only for himself but for those of the club he is passionate about. "Personally, within my job role, I want to continue to learn. I have been fortunate enough to be faced with a lot of challenges during the short time I've been in charge, and I've made sure that, however difficult they may have seemed, I've remained

determined to treat each one as a learning curve. To take this amazing experience at the club with me and be able to use it to constructively go forwards and to develop myself would be the aim. I'm fully aware there is still so much to learn, and I'm fortunate to be in such an in-depth industry with new innovative methods, machinery and technology continually finding its way into the industry, it's exciting."

"I'm fascinated by the science which goes hand in hand with my job. Agronomy is something I would love my career to move towards. I would like to gain further education in that side of things to make sure I can gain the best understanding about

what's going on under the surface as possible. Now, with a new sand-based pitch, here at Eastleigh, it's going to be important to monitor microbial activity. So, I will be keenly wanting to educate myself, whether that be online, further college courses or just my own investigations by speaking to my colleagues and peers all about that."

"I have found watching the pitch rebuild very educational, so maybe a role in pitch design and consultancy might be something I would find interesting in the future. It just makes you realise how much goes into these projects."

Dan concluded: "Basically, I will continue to allow myself to remain completely open

Getting Personal with ...

Dan Barnes - enjoy your meal quietly, unless you are with Boris, Elon and Borat!

Who are you? Dan Barnes, Head Groundsman at Eastleigh Football Club of the Vanarama National League.

Family status? Very proud father to my three year old daughter, Lorelai.

Who's your hero and why? My grandad. He first introduced me to home grown vegetables, how butterflies love cabbage, but don't love a rolled up baton of newspaper and what it took to maintain and upkeep his proud patch in his back garden. His passion and kind nature will never be matched. He also allowed me my first experience using his Allett Cylinder mower in his garden. I swear he knew deep down how often I would get frustrated at a young age that I could not keep a straight cut line when looking after his lawns, but it set me on the right course.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Probably having Liverpool train and use the facilities at the Silverlake Stadium ahead of one of their fixtures at Southampton. Meeting Jurgen Klopp, the players and just the surreal moment watching them train on something you produce and hearing such positive feedback from people of that status within the industry was an extremely proud moment. Along with that, I would say the realisation of what a tight knit and supportive industry this is and how lucky I have been to build working relationships and friends along the way.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? You'd look better cutting the grass if you lost weight!

Which famous people wind you up? A Gok Wan/Keir Starmer love child would just be intolerable.

What's your favourite smell? 100% Petrichor.

What job would you love, other than your own? Crime Scene Investigator. Failing that, some sort of chocolate connoisseur.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? There's potentially far too many to recall!

What is your favourite film? I'm not particularly a film lover, but I have always enjoyed Saving Private Ryan, and Avatar when it first came out was pretty amazing.

What scares you? Pigeons and Worms.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? It's/He's Just A Weed - (After previously being told grass growing cannot be that hard as it 'grows on motorway verges') - got to be Tom Hanks.

What is your favourite sport? Football.

What would you cast into Room 101? People eating unnecessarily loudly.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Baikonur Cosmodrome on April 12, 1961.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To be content with what I have achieved and for my daughter to be proud of me.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Boris Johnson, Elon Musk, Borat.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? The only thing you can control in a situation is your reaction.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? I googled 'What does trivia mean?' The first answer was - "Insignificant or inessential matters; trifles" - therefore Trifles.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Conscientious, ridiculous, weird.



Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Three Times Over (Self-titled EP). Englebert Humperdink - Spanish Eyes. We are the Ocean - Go Now and Live.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? How's the pitch? After the wettest winter on record.

What's your favourite piece of kit?

Probably my drums, but I can't continue to live in the past struggling to accept I could be considered a failed rockstar, so it will have to be the Honda for post-match clean ups.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson? Don't be afraid to ask questions... and just when you feel you're running the risk of becoming a pest - ask ten more!

What talent would you like to have? To be able to write in something other than capitals. I do it constantly and for no apparent reason.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Something which stops keepers kicking the hell out of posts. Maybe a law which states if they do feel the need to aggressively attack the posts unnecessarily then they will be obliged to repair it immediately after with a supplied pot of touch up paint.



minded in order to learn and develop within this industry, which I find incredibly enjoyable and interesting. I feel that I have no better platform to be able to do that than here at Eastleigh. I've supported the club all my life, it's in my veins. I care about it and am excited for its future. Watching the club grow and change over the years has been incredible and I hope we achieve the dream of Football League status."

"I'm especially proud of the tight knit group of people running this place on a day-

to-day basis and believe they/we deserve nothing more. I hope we keep our all-inclusive ethos and models which we are so proud of. Whether it be the first team, our disability teams, ladies teams or walking football groups, there is a real community spirit at this football club. A togetherness which is infectious and something we are all proud and lucky to be part of."



What's in the shed?

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Career progression for his staff is vitally important to John Lyon School's Grounds Manager **Chris Lynch**, and, as he tells Blair Ferguson, coupled with a passion for the job and presentation designed to create an impression, life at this premier educational establishment has been a whirlwind experience

Working for twenty years on Harrow-On-The-Hill means you learn a thing or two about the importance of first impressions. When it comes to schools and the turf, gardens and flowers surrounding them, opinions are made in an instant and often set the tone for the thoughts of prospective parents.

This priority is nothing new for John Lyon School Grounds Manager Chris Lynch. Fifteen years at Harrow School led to a few years at management level and, in 2016, an opportunity at the neighbouring John Lyon School arose to give him a chance to take on a challenge of his own.

We've established that first impressions count and, driving through the Sudbury Playing Field gates in early July, there was plenty to be impressed by. The 26-acre site, home to cricket, football and an FIH accredited hockey pitch which is also used for tennis, is a few days into some rest after a typically punishing school schedule but, given the quality of presentation, you would think it hadn't been played on for months.

It is an exciting time at John Lyon with the all-boys school going co-educational for the first time in their 145-year history having merged last year with another school in Harrow, Quainton Hall. Our conversation about all things John Lyon and the industry



takes place on the pavilion balcony overlooking the pitches and, a short way into the interview, Chris' passion for his job is already coming through, but more so is his desire to develop others and drive them forward in their own careers.

"All I want to do is provide the best surfaces I can for people, but I also want to try and give back as much as I can to promote the industry," he explained. "I've been in it for twenty years professionally (and three years non-professional volunteer work), and I've had the opportunity to work in some incredible settings. Harrow was an astonishing site with a great budget and machinery, and what we could achieve there

was incredible. We won the grounds team of the year award in 2014, and to go on from that and become a manager at John Lyon has been a whirlwind seven or eight years."

"But, in that time, I've been able to bring in different people and work with them to the point they can run their own site and, for me, that's all you can really ask for. If people are happy and they want to progress, then that makes me happy as well."

"I have been fortunate to have had two employers that have been very good at getting me on courses of all varieties. I have completed my work-based NVQ level 2 and 3 City and Guilds in sports turf, chainsaw and spraying licences, as well as more health



**All I want to do is
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It almost makes you feel young again when you see these early professionals at twenty-something years old come in and want to learn straight away. It makes me remember the passion I had at their age



Chris Lynch

and safety training than I care to remember. I have also done many different training courses on machinery maintenance, pests and diseases, farming and safeguarding.”

“Along with that training, being able to get some level of management in the early days of your career is so important because, as I found out very quickly, you might think you know everything, but you soon find out you always still have a lot to learn. My over confidence led to mistakes early on in management, but making mistakes is part of learning and it is best to make these early. So I encourage responsibility in my staff now and give them tasks to manage so they can learn and develop their own techniques.”

“We have brought two brand-new starters in now, and both are so keen to learn, it almost makes you feel young again when you see these early professionals at twenty-something years old come in and want to learn straight away. It makes me remember the passion I had at their age.”

“We start the first six months with their

probation period and, as soon as that is done, both should progress to some form of land based NVQ and potentially several other courses based around their abilities. I think continuing constant education and courses is a great way of keeping staff happy and securing them longer term.”

“I think that education is something this industry still needs to really tackle and grasp because schools like John Lyon are very good at investing in that, but I don’t think that other set ups across the profession necessarily push their staff to do more education and they really should do.”

“For anyone that works under my management, I want them to go out there and have every opportunity to succeed, whether that be here or somewhere else. Joe Naughton, who I worked previously with at Harrow and took on here, has now progressed to running his own site, North Middlesex Cricket Club. And Mark Chandler, who was here for nearly ten years, has gone off to manage Brentford Tennis and Cricket

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For anyone that works under my management, I want them to go out there and have every opportunity to succeed, whether that be here or somewhere else





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Speak to your manager, ask for more responsibility, put yourself out there for projects and this can eventually lead to running a team, a department or a site as well as managing other people

Club. It's a fantastic opportunity for both to go out and start their journeys on the management side of their careers and I am very proud of both. Sometimes, people don't want that managerial pressure, and you shouldn't force it on them, but I think you should always give people the chance to continue their professional development."

"If you think management is for you, then I believe it is important that you assess your career and say 'now' is my chance, don't wait. Speak to your manager, ask for more responsibility, put yourself out there for projects and this can eventually lead to running a team, a department or a site as well as managing other people. You might bring in an eighteen-year-old or a twenty-five-year-old who, in three or five years, can say to you that you helped them get to the point where they can manage projects or greater responsibility either with you or elsewhere."

"And it's that progression through the industry to make sure we've got young men

and women coming in because that's probably one of our biggest problems in this profession. Young people are not coming into the industry, probably because of the money, but there is money to be made there, you just have to progress, and part of doing that is education and continuing development."

Having this training ethos and belief in the power of the first impression is crucial to the John Lyon operation, but backing it up with the final product is just as important. The pitches are used for training every day of the week, with fixtures played several times a week on top of that. The Old Lyonian Football Club also use the site for training and fixtures, as do Harrow Hockey Club and the Bowmen of Harrow. From September, the sports schedule will be added to further by the addition of Quainton Hall, whose numbers will add to the usage of Sudbury Fields and the 600 John Lyon students.

Mixed in with private hires, it leaves the grounds team with roughly ten-fifteen sports

free days a year and makes surface management crucial. Every time someone comes through the gates, the expectation is to see a beautifully presented field and, over five years, Chris has dialled in a programme that meets those standards.

"Like any manager, I will have an element of pressure to perform to high standards, but most of the pressure is from myself. I have always been a firm believer that presentation is key. I know exactly where the site is good and where it needs improving, but I want the entrances and surfaces to look as good as possible as soon as the students, staff, and outside users enter the site. We aren't a massive ground compared to others, but in a way, that means it must perform even higher. I am so fortunate to work with an excellent sports department that is very respectful of the grounds and the work we put into it. Their respect for the facilities is as important as almost anything we do to look after the grounds."

"I try to treat all areas of the fields the

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Starting academically in September, we will have all ten pitch/training areas set up, ready to go. We will also have a deep cleaned MUGA and the extra-curricular activity areas all set up



same way, but our 1st team football pitch and our 1st team outfield area are my priority areas. With extremely high usage, this is often a challenge to keep these looking fresh, but we do the best we can to recover and present the site for each use. I also communicate daily with the Director of Sport and the various heads of specific sports on where to set up to spread the wear of these daily training sessions and matches."

"Starting academically in September, we will have all ten pitch/training areas set up, ready to go. We will also have a deep cleaned MUGA and the extra-curricular activity areas all set up. This will last right through until March with a monthly deep aeration programme and weekly light aeration, cutting, scarifying and brushing. We will run this alongside a monthly liquid feed with a base granular to keep everything ticking over into the cold and wet conditions."

"The machinery we use and how it performs is very important in this process. My

main bits of kit would probably be my Wiedenmann Super 500 Scarifying Collection Unit and my Terra Spike. We run aeration of thick and thin tining every two or three weeks. We cut at 26mm, which is relatively short for pitches when they are getting used seven times a day, but they like them to be fast."

"I always try and go through the surface as many times as I can to keep that air flow, give them a better chance to dry and to keep the plant healthy. The Super 500 scarifying unit is a fantastic piece of kit and it will leave a clean finish. It keeps the surface healthy by thinning the dead grass and removing the dead growth so the air keeps moving through the top of the grass plant and soil and leaves a nice stripe as well."

"Heading into Easter is our busiest three weeks. We turn the site round into four cricket outfields but renovate the pitches with 450 tonnes of good quality sand before seeding. In addition, we set up twelve tennis courts on our MUGA and prep all summer





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As soon as the summer term shuts down, we go into a full cleanout of the outfield/pitches to make sure the grass is as strong as possible for the return of the students for pre-season in August

activity areas. As soon as the summer term shuts down, we go into a full cleanout of the outfield/pitches to make sure the grass is as strong as possible for the return of the students for pre-season in August. It is often very rushed, and you have to hope for a little bit of assistance from the weather gods! It's always a full-on year, but we are fortunate to now have such good machinery and a reasonable budget for various resources."

Sticking to this plan has seen the site

steadily improve, with the progress being recognised by the wider sporting community as John Lyon was named in the Top 100 Schools for Cricketers last year. An achievement like that is a fantastic marker for the Sports Department and Chris and his team of the quality and consistency they've managed to produce year on year, but the improvements haven't been limited to pitches alone.

The site has been chemical-free for just

under two years, with Chris bringing in a ban on glyphosate and other such products. This ecological approach has been met with the school introducing beehives, creating ecological piles along with wildflower areas, and allowing a percentage of the site to be left to long grass to promote wildlife. This has allowed Sudbury Playing Fields to be used in the wider education of students away from sports and embrace the wildlife on offer, and at the two and a half acre

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Heading into Easter is our busiest three weeks. We turn the site round into four cricket outfields but renovate the pitches with 450 tonnes of good quality sand before seeding



outside space at the main school site which itself is home to formal gardens and a large number of protected rose species.

Chris - as he has already mentioned - is fortunate to have the backing of the school when it comes to projects, and the plans for taking pitch quality to the next level are already underway.

"I have an ageing drainage system which is coming to the end of its lifespan, and a very limited irrigation system," Chris explains. "I have been working with my school's Bursar and Finance Director to come up with phased implementation planning to combat this, and I think the last 5-10 years has really shown how volatile and extreme our weather can be, and we need to start development now to combat these events in the future."

"For me, having projects like this gives you something to work towards and keeps that enthusiasm going for your site. So, over the next two years, the plan is to run pop-ups across the entire right side of the site and, the following year, we'll have it on the other half of the site. I have extensive drainage plans but need to level off a few areas first and my irrigation system will help me grow

these back in more quickly and assist any new drainage projects."

"Doing a project like this is also great for the guys on the team because of the experience they can get from it. If I can project manage a job and then pass on some of the smaller areas of the project management to my staff, they will learn from that and be involved in the process of putting in irrigation or drainage across a pitch and will benefit from these techniques."

"I'm excited about what we can achieve with the site once we have better drainage and better irrigation. In my opinion, it's already a good surface, but I still have great aspirations for the site and its facilities."



This ecological approach has been met with the school introducing beehives, creating ecological piles along with wildflower areas, and allowing a percentage of the site to be left to long grass to promote wildlife



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Sedbergh School

The breeding grounds

Located in magnificent scenery between the Lake District National Park and the Yorkshire Dales, Sedbergh School is renowned for its top-level achievement in a wide variety of sports, with boys and girls featuring prominently in national and international teams. Lee Williams caught up with Grounds Manager **Martin South** who, along with his trusted team, have vastly improved the playing surfaces since he joined twenty years ago

Sedbergh School (founded in 1525) covers a vast fifty-six hectares of land, with seventeen hectares dedicated to sports, including cricket, rugby, hockey, tennis and many more. The rest of the site is split between buildings, gardens, grazing and woodland. Sedbergh Casterton Preparatory School sits on twelve hectares of land, including another three hectares of playing surfaces.

When Martin South first joined the school and tested the soil profile, the first 200mm on the winter sports pitches was described as 'sandy clay loam' with fines at around 50%. Combined with rainfall between 1.4m-2m per year and no known drainage system, this explained why the surfaces were black for most of the winter. "On our main areas; Buskholme 1st and 2nd XV pitches, we

introduced little and often sand-spreading throughout the playing season; totalling around two hundred tonnes. At first, it was like throwing flour onto wet dough but, coupled with overseeding using Barenbrug Bar 7, a perennial ryegrass mix, alongside a sensible nutrition programme, we began to see changes in stability and grass cover."

"This helped persuade the school to expand that maintenance style to two other pitches so, out of the seven rugby pitches, we now have four that perform well - considering the extensive use and climate we are in. More recently, footfall has risen through pupil numbers and holiday academies, so we need to expand the level of maintenance further and possibly build more pitches."

"General cutting of the outfields and rugby pitches is carried out two to three

times a week at a height of 20mm (during the growing season), raising to 35mm in the winter, with a Baroness LM3210 and John Deere 900. The main cricket outfield is cut at 12mm, raising to 19mm with the John Deere 7500E. Cricket squares are cut with a mixture of John Deere 220, 260 and Dennis FT610 pedestrian mowers."

"The main cricket outfield has a thatch problem, but we recently purchased a tractor-mounted Graden and Amazone Groundkeeper SmartCut which has made a huge difference. A regime of spring/autumn scarifying, verti-draining, sand dressing and tank mixing seaweed, wetting agent, and light nutrition will further encourage microbial activity and help to control it."

"We are lucky to have built up a reasonable kit list over the years. So, most sports turf surfaces are Verti-Drained - up to



four times per year (at varying depths with different tine sizes keeping them open), with roots extending to 150-200mm.”

Presentation is important to Martin, as this is the first thing people see when visiting the school, but playability and plant health rank higher. “It’s really important to get those right then, consequently, presentation should be covered. I certainly don’t fertilise and cut to make it green and stripy.”

Martin must be careful when considering what fertiliser he applies to the playing surfaces. “We have highly fertile soils so we need to be cautious with fertilisers but, with high footfall on the rugby pitches, we need something ticking away in the background whilst tank mixes of Seamax, Primo Maxx and nitrogen help strengthen and condition pitches. I have found ICL Sierrablen coated fertilisers work best for us and, for the

cricket square, we get great results using ICL Greenmaster granules.”

“For rugby end of season renovations, we hire a two-metre Vredo Supercompact Seeder to bury Barenbrug RPR Sport seed at 12-15mm under the surface; seeding takes place around Easter when soil temperatures are around 12 degrees. On Buskholme, renovations usually take place after the Sedbergh Tens competition (where sixteen teams play over two days), so it is sometimes a battle to get an acceptable outfield for the under fourteens cricket games that follow.”

“We then have Easter Sports Academies to contend with after we have seeded some areas. This is an impact from modern marketing we have had to get used to; unfortunately, it is not ideal for pitch recovery, but it provides extra revenue for



I think there are many ground staff that are undervalued in the Industry, which I think is leading to the shortfall. Demands have grown and I do not think people realise the sacrifices that are being made



has to find the time to keep the school's artificial surfaces in tip-top condition. "We carry out regular drag brushing and power-brushing when weather and time permits. Short corners are re-levelled and marking is done with semi-permanent synthetic turf coatings to save marking time. We can suffer from moss and algae around the perimeters, especially in such a wet climate. We do our best to try and keep it under control, but sometimes we have to call in the contractors with better machines to get surfaces back on track."

In the past twenty years, many projects have been undertaken to help improve the school's playing surfaces. Martin tells me about the projects that have had the most impact. "During my time here, we have relaid most of the first eleven cricket squares. This was all carried out in-house and has contributed significantly to the rise in standards of cricket at Sedbergh, leading to fixtures with Durham, Lancashire and Yorkshire Academies and, more recently, hosting Lancashire County Cricket Club first eleven fixtures."

"In 2013, Duncan Ross Land Drainage





2nd XI new square after renovations

Ltd put primary and secondary drainage into our under sixteen rugby pitch. Primary drainage went in at four-metre centres, with secondary planned at one-metre centres but, due to the rocky nature beneath of Silurian blue rag sandstone which was ripping the tooth mountings from the whizz wheel, we settled for two-metre centres with a plan to sand groove at a later date."

"In 2016, we built a new ten pitch second eleven square. Local contractors carried out

the groundwork and Turfcare Specialists Limited finished the last 150mm with Boughton County Loam. Working with 180 tonnes of loose clay loam in our climate was not easy, but we now have a very useful second eleven cricket square."

The hard work Martin and his team have put into the playing surfaces over the years and major investment from the school has paid off in a big way. Attracting the likes of Lancashire CCC is a massive

**There is only a tiny difference
in preparation from the
pitches we produce for school
to the ones we produce for
county cricket**

achievement and something they should be proud of. "We have hosted Minor Counties Cricket at Sedbergh since 2006 and, more recently, Sedbergh First XI have played against Lancashire, Yorkshire and Durham Academies. We've always had good feedback on the surfaces produced, so when Lancashire CCC was looking to take the game further out to fans, Sedbergh became a place of interest. Then, in 2019, we hosted our first Championship four-day

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We then have Easter Sports Academies to contend with after we have seeded some areas. This is an impact from modern marketing we have had to get used to; unfortunately, it is not ideal for pitch recovery, but it provides extra revenue for the school

game; Lancashire CCC v Durham CCC."

"We are now seeing the fruits of our labour. With the combination of good surfaces and tireless coaching opportunities from Martin Speight, pupils have the chance of professional cricket contracts."

"It is so pleasing to see pupils hone their skills, do well and, the next minute, you're watching them on TV smashing it into the stands. Ex pupils who recently signed professional contracts at Yorkshire CCC include Harry Brook, George Hill and Matthew Revis."

I asked Martin if there are any differences in prepping a wicket for the arrival of Lancashire CCC compared to a regular school first-team match? "There is only a tiny difference in preparation from the pitches we produce for school to the ones we produce for county cricket. We'll have a slightly larger window of prep for County of ten to fourteen days, so a bit more brushing and rolling is undertaken. Essentially though, if we get the time, we try to replicate this for all matches so that our pupils experience what it is like."

Wormcasts have become a real pain when trying to maintain a certain standard of presentation. "Most of the chemicals we used to rely on to prevent wormcasts, leatherjackets and chafer grubs have been revoked. As groundsmen, we are all having to adapt the way we work. Our primary concern is wormcasts so, to try and help reduce the amount of smearing, we are introducing more sand dressings. Weed control is mainly done in-house, but contractors are used on the Prep School sports field."

Helping Martin maintain the surfaces to a high standard, including the school's many garden areas situated throughout the site are: Richard Mason, Senior Groundsman and Martin's right-hand man - who has been by his side for the last twenty years. Dan West; Groundsman (nine years' service), Sam Moore; Groundsman (four years' service), Ian Frost; Head Gardener (twenty-two years' service), plus Gardeners Will Johnson (twenty-two years' service), John Woof (five years' service), Colin Grundy (four months) and Darren Parkin (three months).





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With the combination of good surfaces and tireless coaching opportunities from Martin Speight, pupils have the chance of professional cricket contracts

Ecology is very important to the school and the pupils are encouraged to get involved in the upkeep of the local flora and fauna, which is in abundance around the large site. "We have two wetland areas; the Bruce Loch and Old Peculiar Pond, where the school have a conservation group of pupils and staff under the watchful eyes of teachers Dr McMeekan and Dr Worgan. Bruce Loch has recently been dredged, making a larger body of water and encouraging new growth. During mid-June, the place was alive with Damselflies."

"The various collections of trees around the site are largely maintained in-house and we work closely with the Yorkshire Dales National Park. For any significantly large trees that need to be pruned or felled, we will bring in a local tree surgeon."

"We have recently tried to encourage wildflower areas on the steeper banks. We used to Flymo, but now we just strim them a couple of times a year and it seems to be working as we have already seen Orange Hawkweed, Common Knapweed, Bush Vetch, Meadow Vetchling, Oxeye Daisy and

Lesser Spotted Orchid."

It has been a tough eighteen months for all of us up and down the country, with the restrictions we have faced due to Covid-19 however, fingers crossed, this will be the last time I ask how the pandemic affected the way people have worked. "At the start, five from nine were furloughed, leaving two groundsman and two gardeners managing two sites. Nobody likes the thought of a cut in wages, or to hear the word redundancy when there are bills to pay."

"The workload was obviously increased, but the saving grace was the arid spring which meant that grass didn't get away from us on the main areas and grass banks were left for most of the summer. It was essential that we kept on top of the main grass cutting and traded pitch prep time to renovate cricket squares that were not being used. We also noticed that, without the usual footfall, grass and hard surfaces had an increase in moss and algae. We continued to purchase materials and machinery, but with heavy justification."

"There has been a significant

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- John Deere 5415 74hp tractor and loader/pallet forks
- Kubota M4072 74hp tractor
- Baroness LM3210 fairway mower
- John Deere 7500E fairway mower
- John Deere X748 mini tractor deck
- John Deere 260C/220C pedestrian cylinder mowers x 5
- Dennis FT610 cylinder, verticutter and brush cassettes
- Wiedenmann GXi8 Terra Spike
- John Deere X758 mini tractor deck and snow plough
- Graden GS04 scarifiers x 2 cassettes
- Etesia Pro 53 LKX2 rotaries x 4
- Bomag 2 tonne roller
- Bomag BW75 1.4tonne roller
- Brouwer TR235 300kg roller
- Brouwer TR224 224kg roller
- GKB SP300 sand spreader
- Graden 1200 tractor-mounted scarifier
- Amazone Groundkeeper SmartCut ProGator 2030A & HD200 sprayer and cargo bed
- Turfmech TM 300 Tornado blower
- John Deere X304 mini tractor
- Kleensweep Powerbrushes x 2
- Rytec leaf collector
- Trojan SPR 30 pedestrian sprayer
- iGo Midi linemarker
- iGo Markers linemarker x 2





improvement in video communication, and the pandemic would have hit even harder without it. I think everybody's mental health has suffered to some degree - unless you had shares in Zoom or Teams. It was like being caged in on Groundhog Day. For me, a sense of purpose disappeared. I kept in touch with other groundsman via video communication so that helped, but don't even mention home schooling!"

Back in his younger days, Martin had a dream to play professional cricket. Over a few years, he had trials with MCC Young Cricketers, Yorkshire CCC and Notts CCC, but it was not to be. "I had always helped at my home club Bradford Park Avenue - which was a county out-ground for Yorkshire CCC, so seeing pitches being produced for high-level sport interested me."

"I had a short spell at STRI whilst Park Avenue Cricket Ground was being assessed for YTS training then, in 1984, I started at Park Avenue on the scheme under Roy Whyatt. Roy had also worked in professional sport at Bradford City FC, so he taught me a great deal with a good mixture of mickey-taking. At the same time, I studied Horticulture and Sports Turf Maintenance at Shipley College."

"Roy moved on to Bootham School in

York so, when Bradford CC merged with Bingley CC and Bradford & Bingley RUFC to make Bradford and Bingley Sports Club, I became the sole groundsman where I spent seven years - attracting Yorkshire's second eleven fixtures and league cup finals and also prepping three rugby pitches on the twelve-hectare site."

"In 1992, I moved to Giggleswick School as Head Groundsman, which was a steep learning curve into the demands of getting many pitches ready for different sports, but it gave me the chance to hone my skills and later develop two assistants; Craig Eccleston and David Worthington - who have gone on to become head groundsman themselves."

"Then, in 2001, I joined Sedbergh School as Head Groundsman. I wouldn't say it has been easy and there have been many challenges along the way, but I'm proud of what the team and myself have achieved so far."

With Martin's many years spent working in the sports turf industry, I was interested in finding out his thoughts about how we could raise its profile. "In the last twenty years, our industry has become extremely commercial with people at the top squeezing as much revenue out of, essentially, the piece of turf as possible. There are now two codes of

rugby playing in the same stadiums, also rugby and football sharing. Cricket has tents popping up in late January for nets, then T20 late September early October, not to mention the dreaded pop concert stuck in and around all of these. This has increased the pressures and expectations on ground staff, without a balance of reward. It seems to have become the norm."

"I think there are many ground staff that are undervalued undervalued in the Industry, which I think is leading to the shortfall. Demands have grown and I do not think people realise the sacrifices that are being made to deliver their particular discipline. There is a lot more science and research, so products and techniques have improved, requiring a need for better skills. Many years ago, a senior manager once said to me; I don't know why you spend so much time out there; it looks fantastic."

"I'm not sure how we would raise the industry profile. I dread having to tell people what I do. You are met with either a blank face or they say, oh - you cut grass for a living? It isn't rocket science, but it is a science and a skill with a tremendous amount of commitment involved."

When possible, Martin likes to attend industry shows, seminars and demo days such as SALTEX, BTME, ICL Independent School Seminars and Dennis/SISIS Seminars. "It's great to disconnect from the everyday routine, meet up with other ground staff to swap ideas, build friendships and take in the educational aspects of the seminars. Our garden staff also take trips to estate gardens for inspiration."



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Blundell's School

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the Cox



Blundell's School is a co-educational day and boarding independent school in Tiverton, Devon. It was founded in 1604 (under the will of Peter Blundell) - one of the richest men in England at the time - and moved to its present site on the outskirts of the town in 1882. Grounds Manager **Graham Cox** has been looking after the site for the past eighteen months and spoke to Kerry Haywood about taking on a role during the pandemic

Graham describes his first few months in the role as interesting. "The challenges the pandemic put on myself and the team, whilst each dealing with our own worries regarding the larger issues at play, will affect the mental health of a lot of people for a long time to come. Also, not being able to buy pasta and toilet roll was just a nightmare!"

"During the first lockdown, we staggered breaks and the team was split so that we were able to complete a variety of jobs that would normally have been put out to contractors. We were able to keep on top of the essential works during this time, although jobs such as powerwashing, painting and fencing had to be left. Coming out the other side, we are optimistic about future projects including bore hole installation and, hopefully, some more

all-weather cricket nets."

"I really enjoy projects and try to do as much in-house as possible. From relaying entire cricket squares, to big drainage works. I think that, with good advice and some detailed planning, plus lots of team discussion, there is not much at Blundell's that we are not capable of. It's always good to have something a bit different to get your teeth into on the large site."

The school has 120 acres in total; 45 acres of sports turf which comprises nine cricket squares, thirteen rugby, six mini rugby, four football and four small football pitches, one 400m track, a 200m track and four sets of cricket nets. 35 acres of woodland/parkland and 40 acres of gardens and buildings completes the site.

During the cricket term the maintenance regimes are generally; "Outfields are cut at 16mm for main cricket areas with the

I believe that Blundell's is a great example of the levels that grounds teams can produce, when supported fully by your management team. This, aligned with a highly competent and well-motivated team, means that the future here at Blundell's is very bright





Harry and Holly mowing in front of the clocktower

Jacobsen LF550 (three times per week) and 20mm everywhere else with the Major 4m Swift (twice a week). Rugby pitches are cut at 35mm. We find that this height encourages growth to help produce a great sward which, in turn, helps with recovery and pitch longevity. I think the old school idea of much longer grass only serves to weaken the plant and shorten the lifespan of the pitch. Our recently purchased SISIS Quadraplay is great for both in-season use, for light turf conditioning and also end of season renovations, by levelling and lightly rolling the outfield."

"For aeration, we use a Verti-Drain as much as conditions allow - changing depths on each use. We have also used an Air2G2 and Toro ProCore on stubborn areas and lawns which have offered great results. We used to suffer from heavy thatch in some areas, however, since the purchase of our Amazone SmartCut, removing thatch has become a routine and simple task. As a result, thatch is no longer an issue for us. It also helps remove invasive grasses and weeds."

"We also recently purchased two Dennis

G860's with a verti-cut unit, so we can now undertake verti-cutting on all our cricket surfaces at least once a month. This keeps the turf density to a maximum, whilst making it much easier to rake out for strips when preparing for future games."

When prioritising fertilisers, price and longevity of the product are key factors, with recommendations from other groundsmen too. "In spring, I like to apply a long-term slow release and then use liquid the rest of the year. This allows me to target the needs of the turf (based on weather conditions and wear of the pitch) with the correct application, at the correct time. On the cricket squares, I use several biostimulants which greatly improve the condition of the root mass, plant health and sward of the plant. Johnsons J Premier Wicket is used to overseed all the cricket surfaces and a 3 Way Rye for all our outfields and winter pitches."

Graham describes the soil profile as 'wet'!!!! "Due to the nature of our grounds, the school had to invest in a Wiedemann Terra Spike which we use as often as conditions allow. There are certain areas

I'm a big fan of trying to diversify all staff and have everyone competent at all tasks. However, different staff have varying backgrounds and skillsets that make them better suited to certain tasks



SISIS Quadraplay at work



that have particularly bad compaction issues. We have started to alleviate the problem with a collection of cultural methods such as subsoiling, mole ploughing and use of the Terra Spike. We are getting some results, but it takes time."

"We have also introduced a topdressing programme for our main two fields. In the last two years, these have had nearly 300 tonnes of sport sand added to the profile. This has aided with surface drainage and

the added benefits of root growth, along with faster recovery times for the plant in times of stress."

"I have worked in the independent school sector for a long time and root depth/sward density is always an area that can struggle. This is mainly down to the fact of changing of sports regularly with each term, allowing minimal rest periods for sportsturf. Therefore if, for instance, a rugby pitch gets torn up in December, it can be difficult to get a decent

sward coverage ready for the cricket season in April as you do not have the optimal temperature and conditions for new seed growth. We are lucky to have our own disc seeder and try to use this on all our worn areas when conditions allow."

"During a term, I find that good communication is often key and we try to move training sessions away from particularly wet areas to extend the life of the pitches. It is a difficult position for all

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Getting Personal

Graham Cox - he loves an old book and Spurs!



Who are you? Graham Cox - Grounds Manager at Blundell's School.

Family status. Happily married to Vickie and proud dad to Emily and Josh.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Hosting England Women's cricket.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? Who's that bald fat bloke?

What is your favourite film and book? The Matrix and The Dark Tower.

What scares you? Wasps - not ideal in this industry!

What would your autobiography be called? 'Yeah ... I reckon I could do that.'

What is your favourite sport? Football... COYS! Although, I attempt to play golf and squash.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Jennifer Lawrence, Trevor Noah and Stephen Fry.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? If it was the beginning of the day... would you leave it like that? Or, back yourself!

What's your favourite smell? An old book.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Frank Turner 'Keep England in my Bones', Jack Johnson 'In Between Dreams' and Queen 'Greatest Hits'.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? 'Can I book out that rugby pitch for a cricket fixture this weekend?' ... asked in November!

What's your favourite piece of kit? Dennis G860.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Honest, relaxed and loyal.

What is the most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman? Meet people, ask questions, take criticism, learn and then back yourself.

What talent would you like to have? No more hangovers!

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? A complete ban of dogs on sports fields. With the amount of information on the issue I'm surprised how big a problem it still is.



Graham and Richard using the Dennis G860's

school groundsmen to be setting up for your current term, whilst preparing for your upcoming term at the same time as repairing your previous term's damage. All the while, fitting in other projects in between."

"Over the years, the renovations budget has improved and, as result, the standard of pitches has been raised, however, there is always room for further improvement. There can be a gap between what you can cope with financially for renovations and what you would like to have. This is where a positive relationship with your line manager helps. If you can justify the expenditure and also deliver on the results when additional funds are given, then everybody's happy. I have a great relationship with my Estates Bursar (Ian Barnes). He and our Bursar (Annika Hendich-Wiggans) understand that we are trying to achieve excellence at Blundell's and have given us great support when it comes to providing us with a realistic budget that allows for significant improvement."

"End of season renovations on the cricket nets and squares consist of a deep scarification followed up by overseeding and topdressing with Super Surrey Loam. "It's a busy couple of days where we have all-hands-on-deck and hope that the weather plays nice! The main outfields have a scarification with the Amazone Smart Cut 1800, followed by the Terra Spike, before being seeded, topdressed and irrigated."

"Summer renovations are always tricky to fit in due to usage and external lettings. Also, with the incoming rugby term preparations, it means that planning works can be a thing of very precise timing. It's not helped by our unreliable summer weather ... and, of course, staff taking their own holidays!"

Grahams' team consists of eight full time staff including: Richard Hutchings, Deputy Head groundsman (8 years); Groundsmen - Dan Coffin (5 years), Josh Allen (2 years) and Stuart Kerr (5 years). Plus Gary Everett, Groundsman/Gardener (6 months), Harry Flower,





Head Gardener (4 years) and, last but not least, Holly Smith (3 years).

"This team are great at pulling together and having a can-do attitude. My deputy Richard and our Head Gardener Harry have given me amazing support since my arrival. I'm a big fan of trying to diversify all staff and have everyone competent at all tasks. However, different staff have varying backgrounds and skillsets that make them better suited to certain tasks, particularly when time is against us!"

"I am fortunate to lean on the advice and support of reps - particularly when it comes to new products etc. David Bevan from Agrovista Amenity UK has been very helpful lately, especially when it comes to requiring products at short notice. We also have external help looking after our two all-weather pitches from Verde Recreo Ltd."

"General maintenance on the artificial surfaces consists of a weekly sweep (using a recently purchased Logic MSP), to clear any debris and agitate the sand. We spray an algicide several times a year so that we do not allow the carpet to become congested. Then, Verde Recreo come in a couple times a year for a deep clean and occasional revitalisation works. We had terrible issues with a collapsed drain and compaction on our older carpet. We were able to dig out the drain and replace it (all in-house) to help the drainage - now, with consistent cleaning and algaecide, the whole surface is now free draining."

"Across the site, the changes that new

equipment has made to our grounds is significant to say the least. When I arrived at Blundell's, the team were already on the way to pricing up a new fleet of machinery. We trialled many different bits of kit and ended up purchasing several tractors and mowers from MST (one of our main machinery suppliers who are on our doorstep). They give us great service and supply via Scott Struthers and Andy Parr) - including a 4m wide Major Swift and a Jacobsen LF550, a Mule from Andrew Symons and a SISIS Quadraplay, two Dennis G860's and Logic MSP from DGM. Before this, we also managed to purchase the Amazone and a Vredo discseeder. I would like to purchase a Toro ProCore and GPS marking robot at some point, as well as more battery equipment in the future"

"We tend to use the suppliers of our machines to service the new bits of kit, but we try to do the majority of the rest in house. Our senior groundsman, Dan Coffin, is a mechanical wizard and has saved the day on more than one occasion!"

After twenty-one years in the industry, Graham thinks it is in a far better position now, than when he started. "There is a wider acceptance to the science and skills required to be a successful groundsman. There is also always good support via social media, other groundsman/greenkeepers, reps, colleges and of course the GMA."

"I believe that aesthetics is very important. Not only as a selling point for the school, but for job satisfaction for us the ground

//

If a rugby pitch gets torn up in December, it can be difficult to get a decent sward coverage ready for the cricket season in April

What's in the shed

Iseki TG6495 x 2 (one with loader)
Iseki TXG237 compact tractor
Kubota L3600 tractor
Jacobsen LF570 fairway mower
Major Swift SW400w
Iseki SXG323+ garden tractor x 2
Kawasaki Mule
Club Car Carryall battery
Mountfield 1328H compact lawn rider
Dennis G860 x 2 (cylinders and verticut unit)
Allett Tournements x 2
Powerroll 20
SCH 70I sprayer
SISIS Auto Rotorake
SISIS Quadraplay 1.8
SISIS Multislit
Vredo disc seeder
Wiedenmann Terra Spike GXi8
Amazone SmartCut 1800
Charterhouse 300I sprayer
Bamford flail/hedgetrimmer
Scarab minor road sweeper
Spearhead flail
Logic MSP120 Pro-Sweep
Kirsten snow plough
Billy Goat Gruffalo
Billy Goat Force Blower 9
Stihl; strimmers x4, blowers x 6, polesaw, chainsaws x 2, brushcutters x 2
Husqvarna electric brushcutter
Honda; HRD536 mowers x 2
Honda GVC160 mower
Honda IZY mower
Powerwashers x 2
Linemarkers x 3



I cannot state enough the support I have received from all the team and the school - from new machinery, to investing in staff training and supporting essential renovations and projects



Over the years, the renovations budget has improved and, as result, the standard of pitch has been raised, however, there is always room for further improvement

staff. The wow factor of well-presented grounds can have a lasting impression on prospective parents, current parents and visitors to the site."

Graham told me how he first got involved in turfcare. "After leaving college, I had a variety of jobs before becoming an apprentice at Wellington School when I was nineteen. I stayed there for five years, before moving to Queens College where, over the next nine years, I continued my training, before returning to Wellington as Head Groundsman. After another six years there, I made the move to Blundell's."

"Over the years, I studied at Cannington College (now Bridgwater and Taunton College) for my Level 2 and 3 Sports Turf Management which took several years to complete. I don't think I have ever refused training and, as a result, I have also attained

many chainsaw tickets, spraying certificates, tree surveys and various GMA qualifications ... to name a few. Anybody can work in the industry, but training is key if you want to make it a career!"

"I've had the privilege of working with some great people through the years and gained as much knowledge as possible from each of them. I cannot state enough the support I have received from all the team and the school - from new machinery, to investing in staff training and supporting essential renovations and projects. I believe that Blundell's is a great example of the levels that grounds teams can produce, when supported fully by your management team. This, aligned with a highly competent and well-motivated team, means that the future here at Blundell's is very bright."

History

Peter Blundell, one of the wealthiest merchants of Elizabethan England, died in 1601 leaving money and lands to found a school in his home town to maintain sound learning and true religion. No expense was to be spared in its construction in 1604. Generous lands were provided in Tiverton and South Devon for its maintenance and Blundell's established links between the School and Balliol College, Oxford and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, which survive to this day.

The flow of scholars and clergy has continued throughout their 400 year history. During the last Century there has been continued great growth and change. Under 'Fusty' Wynn (1917-30) numbers first topped 300 and Francis House was built. Under Neville Gorton (1934-43) Blundell's became a dynamo of educational novelty

and, latterly, there has been an explosion of activity. The continued support of the Heathcoat Amory family, with a long tradition of service on the Governing Body, has been a key feature of the last century. Additionally, Old Blundellians via the Peter Blundell Society, and the singular munificence of Sir Christopher Ondaatje (1947-51), have supported many developments over the last fifty years. Girls were admitted in 1975, with full co-education starting in 1992. St Aubyn's Preparatory School became Blundell's Prep School in 2000.

Throughout their long history, the school have been grateful for the support of those who have added to Peter Blundell's initial generosity.

'Great trees from goodly acorns grow!'





Gardening at Blundell's

Increasing biodiversity at Blundell's was a priority when I started in February 2018, the planting at the school consisted mainly of evergreen shrubs with very few herbaceous perennials or annual planting. I was quite surprised by the lack of insects during my first summer here and the difference can be seen after 3 years. With invaluable help from our brilliant gardener, Holly Smith who started in October 2018, we are really starting to see our efforts come to fruition.

A quick win for increasing inflorescence for pollinators, was the introduction of an annual wildflower mix from David Bevan at Agrovista Amenity UK. We had an area of poor grass on the roadside which we sprayed off, topped it up with poor soil and sowed with an annual cornflower mix. The succession of different flowers works really well for various insects and we have seen a diverse range of species of bees, bumblebees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies. No one enjoyed mowing this area, so it is a bonus that it only needs cutting down and clearing once a year! It now looks excellent in the middle of the school and is seen by everyone who drives through.

In other areas (that were previously cut with a pedestrian mower and strimmer), we have now naturalised several thousand bulbs and leave the grass to flower and seed. This not only improves aesthetics, saves time, and reduces inputs and emissions from machinery, but also provides a haven for insects, birds and small mammals.

By planting a succession of bulbs, we can help pollinators throughout the year. Starting with early flowering Crocus species in January, through to late flowering Camassias and Alliums in May and June, we can help insects find a food source from the start of the year. In other areas, we have been using a perennial meadow mix from Agrovista with 80% meadow grasses and 20% perennial wildflowers inter-planted with bulb mixes. By keeping the grass long we are also encouraging native plants, also known as sports turf weeds! Dandelions and Lesser Celandines are an important early food source for bumblebees and, by encouraging them in certain areas of the school, we are starting to see an increase in numbers of pollinators.

This year, we have introduced two native bumblebee colonies to help boost numbers here at Blundell's. The colonies are set up with a queen, 70-80 workers and eggs, so the population will increase to over 200 throughout the season. Over winter, the colonies will hopefully produce new queens and set up new nest sites the following year.

The native bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris audax*) can carry more pollen and can fly at lower temperatures than honey bees, so are excellent pollinators to introduce into any area. We have one colony at the senior school within the Blundell's garden and one at the prep school in the new nature area. They are a great educational resource and show the pupils how a beehive works along with the life cycle of the bees.

We have helped set up an excellent range of gardening activities for pupils with the school's Director of Community Partnerships, Charlie Olive. The area that we use was originally the headmaster's vegetable garden, which had become rundown and underused over the years with just an area of grass and an overgrown fruit cage. The pupils have now put in twelve raised beds producing vegetables for the school kitchens, an outdoor classroom/meeting area, two cut flower beds, a wildlife pond, wildflower area and a chicken run.

We help with the activities that run on four afternoons a week and are really well supported by the School Community as a whole. The pupils run a pop-up cafe where they sell smoothies, hot chocolates, ice creams and snacks outside. The pupils really benefit on so many levels from these activities and, after the past year of lockdowns and spending time apart, being able to spend time outside with friends is increasingly important for their mental and



physical health. And, with only one trip to the Medical Centre and one burnt out drill motor in three years, we think that the pupils are behaving very responsibly!

Elsewhere around the school, we have also been removing and replanting lots of the existing planting schemes that mainly consisted of evergreen shrubs. By planting more flowering plants, the aesthetics of the school have been improved and the food supply for pollinators is also increased. Planting a mixture of herbaceous perennials, decorative grasses and bulbs extends the season of interest and helps the local wildlife, some of the decorative grasses such as *Stipa tenuissima* are an excellent source of nesting materials for birds. By enhancing the aesthetics of the school, we are helping to improve the wellbeing of the students by creating a more pleasant environment for them to live and study.

We have also spent a lot of time renovating all our formal lawns. This has included scarifying, verti-draining, overseeding and installing metal edging.

Our future plans include a new garden cabin for lessons and meetings, more outdoor seating and classrooms, planting a community orchard, new fruit cages, a Christmas tree plantation and school pigs. I just hope the Estate's Bursar doesn't read this paragraph!

Harry Flower - Head Gardener



Blundell's

Twyford School

A kind of magic!

Spare time is not something that **Matt Trickett**, Head Groundsman at Twyford School, has a lot of. Phil Helm MG caught up with him to find out how he manages to look after a huge acreage of sports turf single handedly. As one of his desert island album titles suggests, it's a kind of magic!



Twyford School is one of the oldest Prep schools in the country and can trace its roots back to the late 18th century. Twyford has occupied its current site for over 200 years and is situated in the heart of the village of Twyford, which lies three miles south of Winchester.

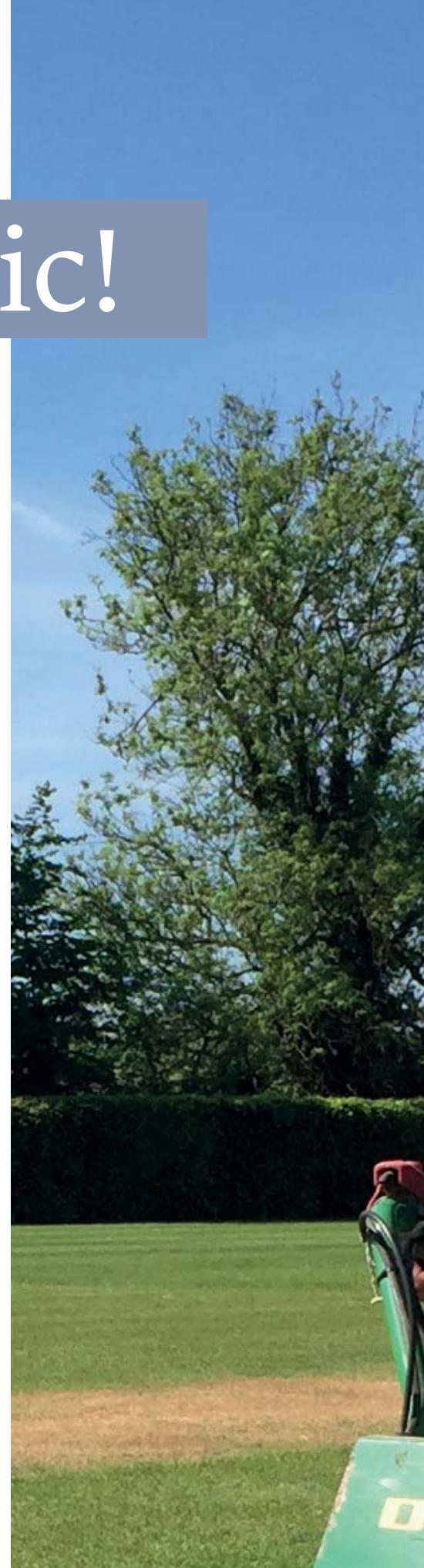
The school nestles within the outstanding South Downs National Park on the outskirts of the historic city of Winchester, with approximately twenty-five acres of extensive and attractive grounds. The beautiful Queen Anne school building sits at its heart and creates a wonderful country feel and atmosphere. During the nineteenth century, buildings were added, including a large schoolroom built in the 1820s, and a mid-Victorian chapel. Original buildings are still used today, with additional building works continually undertaken to keep the school boasting modern facilities whilst successfully

maintaining its historical fabric. In addition, the sports grounds and other outdoor facilities have been upgraded.

Twyford is an independent school, and a registered charity. It welcomes both day pupils and flexi-boarders and has a Pre-Prep school on the same campus for children in Nursery to Year 2. As a whole, it has capacity for around 400 pupils aged 2 to 13.

I met with Matt Trickett on a beautiful sunny day during Half Term to find out how he manages the extensive sports pitches and surrounding grounds. As you can imagine, the school was incredibly quiet without its 400 pupils, and I soon realised the enormity of the role and responsibility Matt had taken on since starting at Twyford six years ago in the summer of 2015.

Matt explained he'd been involved in groundsmanship for over twenty years, although in those early days as a volunteer alongside his day job. He quickly began to





//

On match days, I manage to squeeze another cut in on the wicket when its cricket and freshen up any lines as I feel needed. It's hectic, and sometimes the weather has different ideas but, overall, all works out well



realise that groundsmanship was his true calling and vocation and embarked on gaining his NVQ 2 and 3 qualifications in 2007 and 2008 and picked up his City and Guilds A1/D1 assessor status along the way. All this whilst employed as Senior Groundsman for Fair Oak Parish Council from 2006 to 2012, Eastleigh Football club 2012 to 2013 and Alton Town council 2013 to 2015.

The passion for maintaining surfaces for his two favourite sports (cricket and football) saw him volunteer his services for Hambledon Cricket Club for nine years. He spent a year at Hampshire County Cricket Club, was offered a part time contract, before later returning to Hambledon. Matt is currently Hambledon's Ground consultant and continues to support the club when he has time.

If you're like me, time is something that most of us wish we had lots more of in our roles as there never seems to be enough hours in the day to get everything done! But, for Matt, I was truly inspired by what he was achieving and the surfaces he was producing in the time he had. I couldn't quite grasp how one man (yes, just one man) was successfully achieving it all.

Twyford School offers an impressive selection of sporting activities from cricket,

football, rugby, hockey and netball to lacrosse and athletics (luckily Matt doesn't have to worry about the indoor swimming pool)! I joked that I thought he should be wearing some kind of superhero costume when he began reciting all the areas he had to prepare on a seasonal basis:

- 3 full size football pitches
- 10 small size football pitches
- 1 grass hockey pitch
- 8 junior rugby pitches (which convert into 5 grass cricket areas)
- 2 artificial cricket wickets
- 1 Astro-turf cricket wicket; which converts into 6 tennis courts in the summer and in the winter the Astro makes one large hockey pitch, 2 x small pitches and 3 x netball courts
- The hard court has two netball courts which convert to tennis courts in summer

So, my burning question for Matt was "How does one man complete all this work?" Well, Matt explained it all boils down to a structured routine, efficient time management and long hours! Most matches are scheduled for Wednesdays and Saturdays so preparation, like everything, is

key and revolves around those fixtures. Matt explains: "My normal working hours are 8.00am until 4.30pm but I usually stay until things get done! Mondays I usually try to mow all the larger areas, outfields or pitches on the lower fields, and Tuesdays I try to cut the upper fields nearest the school. The upper areas being used for the senior years games, and of course, I know I can revisit this job again later in the week if needed. However, whilst mowing on these days, I also need to shuffle marking out in between and any repair work which is required."

"On match days (there can be eight competitive cricket games on both days), I manage to squeeze another cut in on the wicket when its cricket and freshen up any lines as I feel needed. It's hectic, and sometimes the weather has different ideas but, overall, all works out well. It's helped with being on a chalky soil which, as part of the South Downs National Park, is very free draining. This soil type does present problems however, as it can compact quickly if not kept on top of and is low on nutrient levels which, of course, helps re-establishment of my multi used surfaces."

To help maintain nutrient levels, Matt applies a general spring slow-release fertiliser and follows up with an autumn





granular feed bought from Avoncrop which does the trick for the year. It's important not to create artificial 'flushes' of growth as this would only compound the extensive mowing required. I discussed Matt's limited use/availability of water to maintain his surfaces and he explained that he didn't overly water, even if he could. Matt explained; "The watering points are limited to the upper field areas nearest the school buildings. When required, I use a couple of

small travelling sprinklers which tend to give some respite to drought conditions. The pressure isn't the best and our sprinklers certainly don't throw out huge volumes of water but that's okay. I believe in sustainability and the natural dry 'look', I'm pleased to say it's a belief shared by the school too." Chemical usage is kept to a minimum as well and this led on to a wider discussion about sustainability. Matt, and the School, are very much aware of

environmental issues and have some excellent 'best practices' already in place. The extensive grounds have an abundance of mature trees and Matt explained most are covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Tree surgeons carry out a survey every three years and all remedial works are carried out by professionals. The wood chippings are stored and used for ground cover in all the landscape beds around the school which is a great way to re-use the spoils of the land.

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Getting Personal

Matt Trickett - Should be 'Super' not 'Grounds' man!

Who are you? Matt Trickett, Head Groundsman Twyford School.

Family status. Single

Who's your hero and why? Dave Roberts (Senior Grounds Manager Liverpool FC) who gave me my inspiration and no question was too silly to ask.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Winning I.O.G.

Industry award 'Best public sector outdoor facility of the year 2009'. Being part of the Hampshire Ground staff for the first two test matches ever to be held at the Rose Bowl (Ageas Bowl).

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? You've found your true vocation, but you should have gone into groundsmanship straight from school!

Which famous people wind you up?

Nasser Hussain. I feel he is over critical on wickets without knowing the effort that goes in to producing one. Nobody tries to produce a bad pitch.

What job would you love, other than your own? Very difficult to answer this one as I love my job so much. I guess I'd become a farmer as I also love animals.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? I once left a paint pot next to a wicket I was marking out and a ball landed straight in it from the adjacent wicket - what a mess!

What is your favourite film? Top Gun; an 80s classic.

What scares you? Wasps!

What would your autobiography be called...and who would play you in the film? A day in the life of a Groundsman. Tom Cruise.

What is your favourite sport?

Football and cricket.

What would you cast into room 101? My mower shed! ha-ha.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? 1913

Antarctic. I have an ancestor that sailed on the ship Terra Nova with Captain Scott.

Do you have a lifetime ambition?

One day become a Premier League Head Groundsman.



What's your favourite smell?

Freshly cut grass.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

Stephanie Powers, Lesley Phillips and Peter Regan.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Be prepared to learn something new every day.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? Sir Hubert Parry was a pupil at Twyford School and wrote the music for Jerusalem (the hymn which was originally penned as a poem by William Blake in 1804). The lyrics were added in 1916 during World War I.

What's your favourite piece of kit?

My John Deere tractor and SISIS Quadraplay attachment.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? A kind of magic - Queen, Slippery When Wet - Bon Jovi and 25 - Adele.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? How does adding water make your roller heavier?

What three words best describes yourself? Honest, caring and hard-working.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old Greenkeeper? Stick at it, adapt what you've got and make it work.

What talent would you like to have? I'd love to be able to paint straight lines! Ha-ha.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? I'd just like the authorities to appreciate and understand the impact of removing Merit Turf granules has on groundsmen with lower budgets.



Matt went on to explain the possibility of a future recycling bay (or bays) for grass waste, twigs/leaf debris and weeds and this could create great compost for future garden schemes.

It was enlightening to see the sheds and realise that Matt achieved all he had with the basics. His motto 'Stick at it, adapt what you've got and make it work' (see Getting Personal with Matt Trickett) has definitely paid off. Matt's attention to detail with all his paperwork and records were second to none. He had all his COSHH data information, risk assessment sheets, chemical usage records and machinery daily maintenance logs all up to date, which I commended him for as no mean feat as he was obviously such a busy man.

It was clear to me that Matt has a great passion (and skill) for

communication. He works closely with the sports teaching team who regularly give him the 'heads up' if fixtures are changed at the eleventh hour. "It's hugely helpful to maintain great lines of communication with Gregg Lewis, and the sports team staff are brilliant," said Matt. "They not only help me with fixture changes but sometimes come out and help with rolling the wickets or assisting me with interpreting the rules and how I set up the various pitches. I really value their support".

Matt was quick to explain he has a great support network within the school and in the wider field and was keen to have acknowledged the assistance from the following colleagues-

- Andrew Harvey - Headmaster
- Kathryn Pillar - Bursar
- Karen Matthews - Estate





What's in the shed?

Jacobsen AR-522 rotary triple mower
John Deere compact tractor
Trimax Striker 190 rotary mower attachments
Pedestrian linemarker sprayer
Sisis Quadratrac
Tractor mounted fertiliser spreader
Honda pedestrian mower
Stihl brushcutter
Stihl strimmer
Stihl blower
Dennis cylinder hand mower
Toro Workman utility vehicle
Cricket ride on roller

Manager and the Estates Team

- Mike Justice (retired work colleague)
- Gregg Lewis - Head of Sport and all the sports staff
- Ashley Wright- Assistant Houseparent Boys' Sports Coach
- Dave Roberts Senior Grounds Manager Liverpool FC (Matt's inspiration)
- 'Topsy' Turner - Hambledon cricket ground volunteer (with Matt)

Roy Michael - Local contractor

- Richard Sharpe - Kingsworthy Garden Machinery
- Darren Holmer - Avoncrop
- Joseph Dommer - Agrovista

Matt's knowledge, passion and enthusiasm has already been 'spotted' by the School and there is a possibility that Matt may begin delivering apprenticeships in the future to the students. Matt was immensely

proud of the opportunity to educate the students and explain his role of groundsman and the wonderful industry of sports turf maintenance we all love. Well done, Matt!



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Envile Cricket Club

Wait a minute Mr Postman



Situated amongst the rolling hills and valleys of Bridgnorth, Staffs, Envile Cricket Club has hosted games since 1821. As they celebrated their 200th anniversary, Kerry Haywood met with groundsman **Paul Clarke** to discuss the vast achievements of the club and how he maintains the pitches around his full-time postman position

Enville Cricket Club lies within the estate of Envile, which extends to some 6,500 acres of spectacular countryside surrounding the pretty village of Envile itself. Chairman Trevor Spears describes it as more than just a cricket club. "The word family is often used to encapsulate our pride in feeling part of something bigger with strong bonds, which means we work together through good times and bad."

As the club celebrated its 200th anniversary, with a week-long programme of games and celebrations, Trevor added: "Envile's illustrious history includes links to royalty, being a prestigious cricket venue in the Victorian era and serving as a wartime

hospital for injured American soldiers. As the current custodians of the club, we will create our moment of history to be remembered with fondness and pride by future generations."

"During the pandemic, when there were very real concerns the club would not see two hundred years, our Envile family stood together and fund raised like never before. I remember my feelings when completing my last mile of the Covid-50 walk and the sense of pride and admiration in our family. My sense of privilege at being the head of such a wonderful club became quite overwhelming. Five members pushed themselves to the limit in completing all fifty miles and more than forty members took



Part-time groundsman Paul Clarke



It's never going to be a full-time position here as it wouldn't pay the mortgage, but if I had my time again, I would get an apprenticeship from an early age and work my way through the ranks

part in various roles. This is something I feel is one the biggest achievements in our two hundred years. Family, pride, togetherness, support, development and success are all positive values at the core of our club, which ensure it is in safe hands as we enter our third century.”

Part-time groundsman Paul Clarke (38) is in charge of achieving the high standards expected from a club with such an exciting and bold history and describes how his days pan out. “My full-time job as a postman means I average around seven/eight miles walking in the morning and then come straight to the club for a few hours every afternoon. It's just me that looks after the ground, but I might get a

couple of volunteers offering help a few hours a week with rolling or cutting the outfields etc.”

“I get paid minimum wage, which just about covers my fuel, but it's not about that for me. I used to play cricket here and I first started helping out nine years ago (after taking voluntary redundancy as a civil servant). I took the position as a postman and the club recognised I had a bit of spare time so I offered them six hours a week to undertake basic work and do what I could. That gradually increased and I now work around twenty hours per week in the summer.”

“Along the way I have picked up a few qualifications including Level 2 Cricket

Grounds Maintenance, Level 1 Football Grounds Maintenance and my PA1/PA2 certificates.”

“Gradually, as the ground has improved, so has the interest and the number of teams at the club. We now have the 1st and 2nd teams plus junior games, County girls under 11's and under 13's, as well as County boys for Worcester - which can amount to five games per week.”

Unusually, the site also hosts Envile Athletic FC, who control their own budget and everything that happens on the football side. “There are discussions each year about how the outfield is handed over to them for their season and then handed back. After the full-size pitch and the junior



During the pandemic, when there were very real concerns the club would not see two hundred years, our Envile family stood together



pitch have been used throughout winter it's always a challenge, but fortunately, this year (due to grants surrounding Covid), we were able to put £3500 into the outfield in March which has made a huge difference. We reseeded, fertilised and applied weed killer and the club has seen the benefits and results of how this injection has made the club look aesthetically - which will hopefully continue. There was, at one time, reference to our cricket club being the finest in the world, even above Lords, so we have a lot to live up to."

"The slope here is almost identical to Lords, which is quite a challenge when there is only one of you and you're trying not to flood the square. I learnt that the hard way in my first season here, when I flooded the first team pitch just before their Saturday game."

"We have a total of sixteen wickets and

watering is always a challenge because of the slope. Ten days before a game, I will cut at 9mm with the Lloyds Paladin or the Ransomes Super Certes and water heavily, then cover the squares if the temperatures are going to be high. Following this, I continually brush and roll with the Arman Road Roller and then cut down to 6mm the day before the game and carry out final prep and marking. The outfield is cut at 14mm, two to three times a week depending on the weather, with the Jacobsen TR3 cylinder mower. At the end of the season, renovations include 3-way scarification, an application of Limagrain MM50, topdress with K loam and an autumn/winter fertiliser application."

"Seed was one of the first things I changed when I first started here. The average score was low; you could win a game with 120 and there was low bounce





Arman Road Roller



due to the amount of sand below the surface. I came in during April, after the County pitch advisor had attended, and he strongly suggested we need to improve the surface. At the end of the next three seasons, I soaked the squares, Verti-Drained and applied the loam and it's improved greatly over the last few years - now you need a score of 250 to be in the game! It's not perfect, it never will be without a full-time groundsman, but I'm proud of it and the club are happy."

"I managed to pick up a SISIS CombiRake for £50 off eBay and that has been a godsend. Two years ago, we were fortunate to get a grant to buy the John Deere 2520 tractor which makes moving the covers a lot easier and, last year, I was able to Verti-Drain the whole field four times which cricketers have noticed the difference after heavy rainfall. My wish list would include new mowers for the wickets and squares as the ones we have now do a great job, but they are twenty years old."

Paul has become pretty handy over the years and undertakes the oil changes, servicing, filter changes etc himself. Anything too technical or the sharpening of blades gets done externally.

Estate owner, Peter Williams, has a team who maintain all the trees and anything

outside of the grounds boundary. "Over the years, I have got to know Peter's team well and we communicate regularly about everything that is going on across the estate. Essentially, the cricket ground is their front garden and I take pride in it looking pristine for Peter and the general public who walk the estate."

As part of the celebrations, Paul had to prepare the ground for a game each day over the week's festival, which was no mean feat given the mini heatwave the country saw during July. Paul had a lot of help during the celebrations in an attempt to hold back his nickname of 'Mr Grumpy' coming out too much. "In 2013, I was awarded the name in my first season and it just stuck. I probably deserved it back then, but I have mellowed somewhat over the years. I wanted to change people's attitude to the grounds and maintenance and, as a result, I think the club have more respect now for the job I do here and trust in what I'm saying."

"It's never going to be a full-time position here as it wouldn't pay the mortgage, but if I had my time again, I would get an apprenticeship from an early age and work my way through the ranks."

Keep walking those miles Paul - you're doing a great job!



Gradually, as the ground has improved, so has the interest and the number of teams at the club



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Blackpool illuminated

Street cleansing and Groundcare may appear unlikely bedfellows but they are buddying up well in Blackpool. Greg Rhodes talks 'integration' to Grounds Maintenance Coordinator **Nick Horner**



Blackpool Council became a unitary authority in April 1998. Flanked by Lancashire, Fylde and Wyre councils, it manages an extensive portfolio of sports pitches, playgrounds and parks.

"We have a dedicated grounds maintenance department of twenty-one staff," explains Nick Horner, the council's Grounds Maintenance Coordinator, "but the complement has been reduced significantly due to nationwide austerity cuts over the last ten years."

Split into bespoke sections covering arborists, playground technicians, gardeners and groundsmen, the maintenance team has adapted and evolved in the wake of

budgetary constraints into a morphed organisation managing an even broader operational remit.

"Blackpool Council has had to adapt and react proactively due to austerity measures," Nick notes, "integrating the grounds maintenance service with the street cleansing department has been a key element of this, bolstering the combined workforce to over 80 staff."

"The Streetscene body created allows us to cater more for the needs of residents as a unified department," he explains, "caring for the operational needs of parks, green open spaces, grass verges, playgrounds, trees and sportspitches, whilst taking responsibility for street cleansing, refuse bin emptying,

removing fly tips, enforcement, weed spraying, gritting and beach maintenance."

The scope of the task may sound daunting to traditional grounds teams but local authorities enjoy an enviable track record of evolving as times and climates demand.

"Under our new unified amalgamation with Street Cleansing, we're finding this multi-tasking approach works very well," Nick reports. "Staff still retain their specialist fields of expertise but we can develop staff members' skill sets further and have multi-tasking individuals rather than a one-dimensional approach."

"Streetscene has also brought a managerial coherence around the operational role of grounds maintenance,



Aerial view of Stanley Park,
Blackpool's jewel in the crown

with the broader strategic role of Parks Development and the longer term vision for improving green open spaces sitting separately within the Parks Development Service," he adds. "A clear, direct line of management exists under unification. The senior grounds maintenance coordinator works alongside the senior cleansing coordinator, reporting directly to Head of Waste and Environmental Operations Service Jez Evans.

Blackpool was already managing a welter of sports and amenity provision before Streetscene emerged. "We have over thirty playgrounds," Nick states, "and more than fifty sizes of football pitches, all-weather surfaces, bespoke 400m athletics arena,

which hosts the Lancashire School Games, skate park and international BMX track venue, netball and tennis courts, even a model village."

"We have a vast number of green, open spaces and parks, including consecutive 'Park of the Year' for 2017/2018 Stanley Park alongside the ecology site Marton Mere Nature Reserve."

Elements of Blackpool's iconic development in the Victorian era of the 1800s up to the Art Deco period of the 1920s (Stanley Park being one) rest with the council to manage sensitively, as it seeks to sustain the town as a major tourist destination and sustainable place for its local community.

New amenity areas have arisen too.



We've over 250 green, open spaces and parks, including consecutive 'Park of the Year' for 2017/2018 Stanley Park alongside the ecology site Marton Mere Nature Reserve



A full end of season regrinding on cylinder machines can run into thousands. The winter service for the Major TDR batwing is coming in at a few hundred pounds

Marton Mere is an SSSI site replete with hundreds of species. "A biodiversity hotspot," says Nick, who reveals a startling truth. "The Mere was part of a landfill site in the 1940s."

Within the Parks Development Service, the Parks Development Manager, who also undertakes the statutory Tree Officer role, and the Green Infrastructure Development Manager, who is overall responsible for the Parks Development Service, work closely with the operational team. Nick explains: "The focus of the parks development service is to work with friends groups, wider community groups and partners to develop Park Development Plans and secure funding to improve the green spaces across the town."

"The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy highlighted the low tree canopy across the town, so the focus has been on developing a Tree Strategy which focuses on 'the right tree in the right place' to create a greener environment and increase the tree canopy in the longer term," Nick reveals, indicating the scope of the plan.

The team can feel rightly proud of their part in creating the 'UK Park of the Year' two years on the bounce. The 250-acre Stanley Park - the borough's "Jewel in the Crown" - presents an exciting, uplifting and satisfying setting that embraces several contrasting green environments and varying topography.

Opened in 1926 by the Earl of Derby, the Grade II listed site appears on the register of historic parks and features Art Deco designs, Italian gardens, with extensive bedding plants and Italian marble fountain, period café and bandstand, visitor centre and a 21-acre boating lake.

Looking after the ten pitches that spread across a good proportion of the park, the grounds maintenance team also have their work cut out keeping them in prime playing condition.

"We've selected machinery for its ability to manage large areas sustainably," Nick confirms. "The Major TDR16000 batwing mower, towed by a John Deere 6110MC



The entrance gates to double award winning Stanley Park

tractor, delivers the job for us."

Grounds maintenance operative Tasos Lambrou, who's busy tending Stanley Park's pitches, continues: "We're managing 100 acres of striped grass in the middle of a rundown area, he says, "proof that we are working hard for the community to deliver quality sporting provision."

"The batwing stripes brilliantly and we can run it seven hours a day and it doesn't miss a beat," he adds: "The staff love the machine as it never goes wrong"

"The switch from cylinder mowers to rotaries has worked well," Nick confirms. "Like night and day in terms of running costs, and the mowing techniques produce a high quality of cut, be it a grass verge or sportspitch."

"The biggest benefit is shaft-driven blades as opposed to belts - a notoriously weak spot on a rotary machine. When we kick off in the morning, the team feels reassured that nothing is going to go wrong."

"We dealt with cylinders on our large open spaces for years prior. You'd spend an hour setting up the machine only to hit something

in the grass and the machine would be off the road. That's something we can no longer afford to happen. A cylinder could go over a pound coin and you'd be in trouble. A brick wouldn't trouble a machine like the batwing."

"We cannot afford for our pitches to be overgrown. The longer the grass, the more chance of running over hidden objects that could damage the machinery but, even then, the batwing cuts brilliantly. You can be tackling grass a foot high then, after a slight adjustment, be back mowing pitches. The Major is seldom off the road. I've rarely come across machinery that is so reliable and versatile."

"A full end of season regrinding on cylinder machines can run into thousands. The winter service for the batwing is coming in at a few hundred pounds."

"That's a minimal outlay, especially as winter servicing hits every council like a bomb every year and can rack up £20,000 to £30,000 in servicing costs. When we're not using the batwing to mow, we disconnect the tractor to use it all year round for other Streetscene tasks"



Nick Horner has been very impressed with the new purchase of a Major TDR batwing mower



Major TDR batwing being put through its paces

The policy switch to rotaries has brought another huge benefit. "Grassroots football is very important to Blackpool Council," Nick notes. "We didn't have the right machinery to deliver the right standard of presentation, given the challenges of mowing grassed areas of a local authority, but we do now."

"The quality of presentation we can achieve has increased demand hugely. We have seen an increase in the number of clubs that use the pitches now compared

with previously."

"When the goals are up and we've marked out, the pitches look out of this world. Walking to the top of the hill and looking down at the different boxes and shades of stripes makes you feel you are on Match of the Day."

"The kids are loving it and the frequency of cut on sportspitches is now weekly in peak growing periods."

The team also runs a fleet of five Toro

When the goals are up and we've marked out, the pitches look out of this world. Walking to the top of the hill and looking down at the different boxes and shades of stripes makes you feel you are on Match of the Day

LTF3000 ride-on flail mowers along with the batwing, Nick adds, "as they cope so well with the inevitable debris we encounter but still provide a quality finish".

Dennis cylinder and Etesia rotary mowers cover off the close-mow areas, whilst handheld machinery the team use includes Stihl strimmers, hedgecutters and chainsaws alongside Eliet shredders and flatback transit tippers.

Blackpool Council has rationalised its

"Our Major TDR runs at max power 7 hours a day. It doesn't miss a beat!"

Tasos Lambrou, Grounds Maintenance, Blackpool Council.



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Integration has massively improved our logistics and ability to react. The cleansing team were able to complete the green and open spaces herbicide application on their quad bikes for us, instead of on foot as before



Blackpool's famous tower overlooks its equally famous beach



Keeping Blackpool beach in pristine condition

services in response to the austerity measures introduced in 2011. "The cuts have forced improvements of the kind that merging departments brings," Nick says.

It is keen to encourage as many resident visitors to its open spaces as it can - an ambition that remains as strong now under Streetscene, as before, Nick stresses. "The merger has worked really well for the staff on the ground and the community as a whole. We can work as a team on a far wider remit that includes tackling litter and fly tipping, alongside managing the grass. As a unified department, we can hit all the elements in one fell swoop as a single force. Rather than running separate services, the focus has become a unified response."

Alongside the Operational Streetscene Team, the Parks Development Service is highly proactive, in terms of funding, grants, engaging community, Better Start initiatives. They work closely with bodies such as Sport England to secure external funding for various initiatives across the authority.

Some sporting provision has shrunk over the years due to lack of demand (crown green bowling for example) and, whilst the team still use cylinder mowers to mow fine

turf, their application to a traditional Northern stalwart is dwindling.

"Bowling suffers from a lack of patronage going back twenty-five years," Nick states. "We had to rethink things." Blackpool could once boast more than twenty-five rinks but the sport has slowly declined since the 1960s.

Staff numbers have taken a hit too. The 300 that so splendidly showcased the borough sixty years ago now number just twenty. "Today, councils have to think on their feet and adapt," Nick states.

The workforce who knew only groundcare and garden care are being retrained with more emphasis on multi-tasking, "but we still retain twenty specialist groundcare/gardeners," he confirms.

That shift applies on 'both sides of the street', he adds. "All hands were applied to the pump recently to grit when the cold snap hit us."

But, he stresses: "integration has massively improved our logistics and ability to react. The cleansing team were able to complete the green and open spaces herbicide application on their quad bikes for us, instead of on foot as before, for example."



Beach cleaning



Streetscene vehicles ready to clean up!



The green strategy is alive and kicking in Stanley Park. "We're very much about recycling - a huge deal right across the borough," Nick states. "Green waste is regenerated in a bespoke compost site in the park, whilst wood is chipped and shredded before the team apply it directly on to beds and borders."

Whilst the maintenance shed at the council's main depot includes a wood chip bay with 30-tonne capacity, segregating different materials in different bays.

The full-size 3G rubber crumb pitch at Stanley Park which S&C Slatter installed in 2018, thanks to funding from the Football Foundation is heavily used for football, so regular sweeping is key to maintaining optimum playing conditions. "The contractor replenishes the crumb every six months," Nick reports.

With the sand-based hockey pitch sitting alongside, the two facilities are major elements of Blackpool's sporting provision, together with another two full-size natural turf football pitches and rugby pitch, multiple 9-a-sides and a 7-a-side, situated in parks across the borough. "Part of our remit is to liaise fully with the junior and senior teams

hiring the facilities," Nick confirms, "as to their requirements."

Besides its council-managed sport, leisure and amenity sites, the authority owns a couple of club grounds. Blackpool Cricket Club is an outground of Lancashire Cricket, whose own maintenance team tends the turf for the venue, held on long lease from the council.

The McKenzie-designed 18-hole parkland golf course came under Blackpool's upkeep until last April when that too was leased out.

Working within the Parks Development Service are seven park rangers, some of whom are funded via the Blackpool Better Start Programme, whilst others are funded through the HeadStart Initiative and innovative partnerships with local community organisations. Prince William visited the Better Start Scheme in Revoe Park, where two former bowling greens have transformed into a community garden and bespoke dog-walking area. "Another example of a council engaging with the community and adapting proactively to the changing times," says Nick.

Fresh thinking on a monumental scale though is the newly completed project within Anchorholme Park, which reopened in July



Green waste is regenerated in a bespoke compost site in the park, whilst wood is chipped and shredded before the team apply it directly on to beds and borders

after being closed for five years.

Water provider and treatment company United Utilities have built an £80m underground wastewater storage basin and pumping station there.

United Utilities spent some £4.5m improving the park to house top-edge fully inclusive play area, café, multi-activity games area, bowling green and clubhouse and performing arts space.

"Councils have to be more resourceful than ever nowadays and the integration here at Blackpool demonstrates that in a positive light," Nick declares.

Given that, the surface area devoted to gardening on the one hand and sportsgrounds maintenance on the other are about equal, as is footfall, Streetscene has some key decisions on treatment options.

Spraying is a necessary part of the maintenance mix but has to be managed sensitively, within the borough's green strategy and taking due account of those using Blackpool's outdoor provision and amenities.

Streetscene issues social media posts to alert the team of "bespoke dog wardens" about imminent activity. "We inform the





Whilst we carry out chemical treatments, we do limit glyphosate application as much as we can. We're leaving more open spaces wild, mowing less often, and planting more wildflower areas

community about which areas we are spraying, due to the concerns about using glyphosate," Nick explains. "Starting in March, it's a boroughwide programme covering pavements, streets, parks, hard areas, grassland amenity areas and the parks."

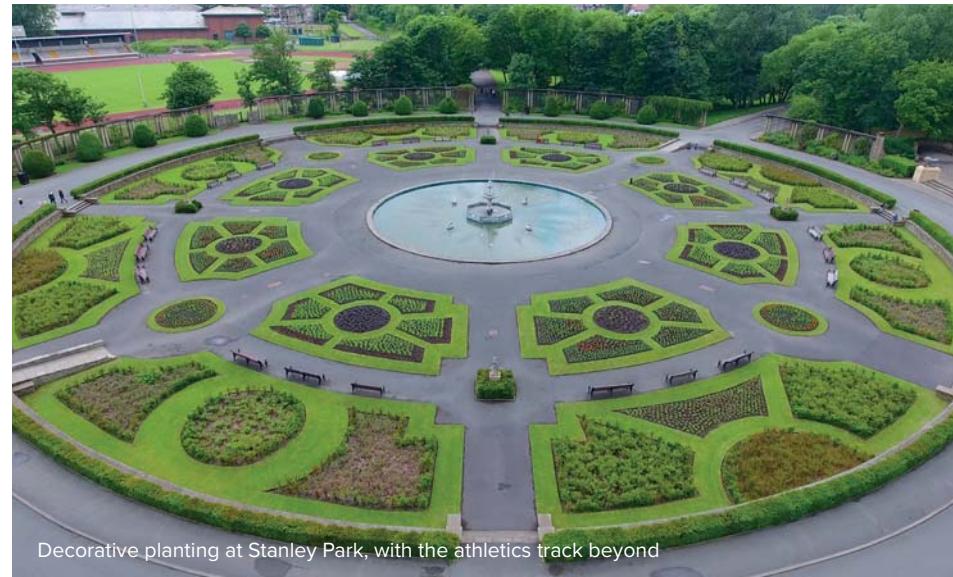
"Whilst we carry out chemical treatments, we do limit glyphosate application as much as we can. We're leaving more open spaces wild, mowing less often, and planting more wildflower areas," he continues. "The team mow green paths through the wild areas to ensure access, and leave the rest - twenty acres of grass are left long."

Pressing issues such as invasive species have to be addressed. "Japanese knotweed is present in Marton Mere, plus some giant hogweed," Nick reports. "Our in-house management programme is in place to help keep the outbreak in check."

The merged departments maintain a mini

What's in the shed?

- Toro LTF3000 3 unit flail machines
- Major TDR16000 batwing
- Major Synergy front deck
- John Deere 6110MC
- Claas Celtis
- Case 610
- Timber Trailer
- Barber Surf Rake
- Dennis pedestrian cylinder mowers
- Stihl and Husqvarna chainsaws, brushcutters and hedge trimmers
- Etesia pedestrian rotary mowers
- Eliet shredders
- Honda Quad Bikes
- John Deere Gators
- Johnson and Hako Sweepers
- Multiple Ifor Williams Trailers
- Peugeot and Ford Transit flat-bed fleet



battalion of Cooper Pegler and Berthoud 15l knapsacks for spray duties, alongside a fleet of quad bikes. "The UK wholesaler, Spindrift Sprayers, supplied them. Based in Garstang, near Preston, they are an example of supporting local companies, and also service our Glider linemarkers from Rigby Taylor, which give a nice quality finish using Impact paint."

All staff are armed with PA1/2 PA6 certification, so spraying is shared across all the team. But the clock is ticking on what herbicides can be applied. "Glyphosate is under constant scrutiny and review," says Nick, "so we are already introducing alternatives such as a 'weed ripper', which can be attached to our street sweeping machine - a way of removing weeds without using chemicals."

Nick communicates daily with Head of Street, Waste and Environmental Operations Jez Evans to ensure smooth Streetscene services. Life is never perfect though, something invariably turns up to challenge the team, but with a greater combined resource than before they are much better placed to react.

"Fly tipping blights our parks particularly," Nick explains. "Now we are part of a combined Streetscene team, we are enjoying more success with combating the

problem because members of the grounds team are now qualified local enforcement officers and can meet the culprits head on. Another example of how the Streetscene integration has had a positive effect."

Nick himself is well versed in sector specifics. He spent three years at Myerscough College qualifying with National Diploma in Sportsturf and Turf Science, alongside fellow academic peers Jonathan Calderwood, Ian Kinlay and Craig Aitken, who have all gone onto have successful careers in the industry.

"Born locally, I left school at 16 and started at Myerscough full-time straight after my GCSE's," recalls Nick, still only 41, then worked seasonally for Blackpool, taking in a six-month spell of work placement at Manchester City's then Maine Road stadium under the experienced eye of Head Groundsman Lee Jackson.

Covid-19 hit the borough hard, as with all of the industry, says Nick but the team responded brilliantly.

"It's been tough. We had to adjust rapidly. One initiative was that staff were able to have a vehicle each, so that we ensured we did the best we could for the workforce isolated in their bubbles."

"Patronage of our parks and open spaces shot up massively during lockdown, with





record numbers using the parks,” he adds. “It was recognised, at an early stage, the importance of our department in ensuring these areas were well maintained, for safe use by the public, even when most of the country was in lockdown.

Friends groups continue to play an increasingly important role in site maintenance; a national trend upwards that shows no sign of letting up.

“We are fortunate as Blackpool has so

many willing people only too pleased to help within the local community,” says Nick. “We are more than happy to support those in the community who wish to become involved. They don’t disappoint.”

“Whether litter picking across our Green and Open Spaces, assisting with maintaining parks and teaming up on the town’s famous stretch of beach, armed with gloves and bags, volunteers form part of the borough’s maintenance fabric, and we actively support

We are fortunate as Blackpool has so many willing people only too pleased to help within the local community. We are more than happy to support those in the community who wish to become involved. They don't disappoint

those who wish to volunteer by offering as much assistance as we can, providing PPE to ensure a safe working environment for our volunteer groups and working alongside these groups by way of support whenever possible.”

Blackpool Council

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As seven out of ten councils make efforts to encourage wildflowers on road verges*, **Alastair Rowell**, UK sales manager for turfcare equipment at Reesink Turfcare, looks at the effect this has had on the way councils, local authorities and contractors maintain their green spaces and the machinery they use

All over the country, councils, local authorities and contractors are letting well-manicured grass grow out to create wildflower areas. There have been many reasons for this: a growing focus on climate emergency declarations, establishment of council carbon management programmes, the widespread decline in pollinating insects in the UK and growing public acceptance for alternatives to traditional council green space management.

The maintenance of the country's green spaces has been changing subtly for years

but reduced teams, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has pushed this into a nationwide conversation and put the UK firmly on a path to managing the country's green spaces in a different way.

One of the few benefits of the spring lockdown last year was that wildflowers were able to bloom on roadsides as the pandemic forced maintenance teams to stay at home. An explosion of colour followed across the UK, and the resulting showcase of colour provided an unexpected joy to many members of the public and made them realise they could share their urban space with wildlife.

Looking after urban verges and green spaces can be challenging. Implementing changes to 'rewild' areas can cause complaints that the grass is scruffy and unkempt, resulting in neighbourhoods looking abandoned and concerns about increased littering. The good news is that you can encourage flower-rich verges and ensure visible management.

What is rewilding?

In this case, rewilding is the creation of wildflower meadows using low fertility soils, re-establishing natural processes to repair ecosystems and boosting biodiversity. The UK has the space to make a difference. In a research paper**, it was reported that verges account for about 1,000 sq miles (2,579 sq

km) of the UK's land which has, up until recently, been maintained as short, frequently mown grassland.

This is an overlooked but vital habitat which can be home to more than 700 species of wildflowers. As 97 percent of Britain's traditional meadows have vanished since the 1930s***, these areas of land are increasingly important for flowers and other wildlife if managed correctly.

Councils, local authorities and contractors have the power to support billions of flowers nationwide with a mowing regime that helps wildflowers thrive. Changing the way these areas are maintained by reducing mowing provides more flowers for pollinators, allows plants to set seed and creates better habitats for wildlife. And the good news is verges don't have to be long to be wildlife-friendly. Species such as clovers and trefoils, among many, grow quite happily at ankle height and support a huge array of pollinators.

Rewilding has the added benefits of cutting carbon emissions, saving money and protecting nature, as well as to eventually looking incredibly pretty.

Framing verges

Roadside verges are increasingly important 'wildlife corridors' for plants, flowers and invertebrates across an increasingly fragmented countryside. This type of land, defined as the strip of land between the



Customers can be a little nervous of investing in the unknown such as a flail instead of a traditional cylinder or rotary mower, which goes against a purchasing decision they've been making for years



roadside and the fence, presents significant opportunities to improve verges as multifunctional green spaces in urban areas and densely populated regions where land scarcity is an issue.

The Local Government Association says councils must keep verges short to ensure motorists have a good line of sight and allow pedestrians to walk safely alongside busy roads. Other reasons are to prevent the spread of weeds and invasive species into private gardens and pressure from local communities to maintain a certain aesthetic appearance.

Cutting narrow strips around the wilder verges to frame them is a simple but effective way to give the perception of tidiness and help combat the view that wildflower-rich verges are untidy and neglected, potentially offsetting potential negative feedback.

Framing verges involves cutting a one-mower-width, or at most 1.4m, along the front edge of the verge to frame the longer grass and wildflower area behind it. This lets people know that the area is purposely being left and that it hasn't just been neglected. This approach has two other important benefits:

Keeping roads safe: The area of shorter grass at the front of the verge can preserve good visibility and ensure safety at junctions, as well as keeping footpaths through green spaces open and accessible.

Structural diversity: The two different heights of vegetation - short in the front and long at the back - are great not only for plant

diversity (some species are naturally low growing, others tall) but supports lots of insect life too.

Maintenance of framing verges

Framing verges requires regular maintenance of between two to four weeks. Traditionally, councils, local authorities and contractors would use triple cylinder mowers or rotary mowers for keeping the grass shorter as they provide the best cut and after-cut appearance, but as they can only cope with grass that is cut quite frequently, they're not suitable to this new approach.

This change in requirements makes the job of the mower three or four times as hard because they're not cutting as regularly. The upshot is a flail mower is the better option for these areas because they can cope with longer grass, less frequent cuts and are cheaper to maintain.

A triple flail mower, such as the Toro LT-F3000, mimics the size, cutting width and manoeuvrability of a traditional triple cylinder mower. The flail cutting heads are able to cut long and short grass, wet or dry, and leave a much better after-cut appearance than a rotary mower.

Customers can be a little nervous of investing in the unknown such as a flail instead of a traditional cylinder or rotary mower, which goes against a purchasing decision they've been making for years. But the technology around today and tough field testing means perceptions are starting to change and councils, local authorities and contractors are seeing this as a viable solution for solving a lot of the mowing



An example of cutting a strip along a pathway to frame the longer grass and keep footpaths open and accessible

issues these budget constraints and less frequent mowing cycles create.

The Toro LT-F3000 has the added benefit of an interchangeable cylinder attachment which gives versatility and the capability for the front-facing triple mower to cut two ways if and when needed: tougher cutting with the flail or finer with the cylinder. Very useful for those maintaining roadside verges as well as local parks or playing fields.

Toro understands that the groundscare sector has many different areas and challenging environments to cut, from the widest open spaces to the narrowest verges, and roadsides with longer grass to recreational fields with shorter. Having a mower that can, with the easy attachment of a cylinder unit, tackle the longer grass and then multi-task by extending its use to leaving a premium finish on playing fields and sports grounds is a really cost-effective solution.

Plus, it can also easily turn its hand to annual roadside verge grass cutting programmes ensuring all visibility areas, sight lines and junctions are tackled as well as the bank and cutting to clear long grass and maximise control of vegetation height.

Maintenance of 'wild' areas

The vast majority of amenity grassland and urban verges may have little biodiversity value, but they have significant potential. The key to realising this lies in 'cut and collect' whereby highways authorities remove the grass cuttings from the site. The most effective way to encourage wildflowers in grass is to reduce soil fertility. Collecting the

thatch of decaying grass removes nutrients and reduces the fertility of the soil and, as wildflowers thrive in poor soils, means that over time more wildflowers will thrive and less vigorous grass will dominate.

If there is a significant reduction in ground nutrients over successive seasons, the result is shorter grass and greater species diversity. Over time, it should be possible to reduce the cutting regime from 10 cuts annually to two or three cut-and-collect mowings each season, and the grass remains relatively short, because growth is suppressed. As a result, there will be more wildflowers.

Where wildflowers are well-established, one annual cut in the autumn when seeds have been set will be sufficient. For this type of work, cutting down wildflowers in a single pass, then something like a SICMA flail mower attachment is ideal.

Something the recent pandemic and series of lockdowns has given the nation is an appreciation for the outdoors, the simple pleasures in a daily walk. Alongside the array of other benefits rewilding brings, it showed so many people that an eruption of wildflower colour belongs in cities just as much as the countryside.

Framing wild verges is a cost-effective, practical solution in the journey to road verges being designed and managed to support an array of wildlife - just don't forget to communicate any changes to verge management. Flower-rich verges are increasingly popular with local communities and are a great way of encouraging wildlife into the heart of the built environment; and verge signage makes clear that wilder

verges are intentional and can engage local communities, helping to address negative perceptions of wilder areas.

Sources: *Freedom of Information data gathered by The Press Association
** Horticulture Week *** The Guardian

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Newby Hall

Newby's newcomer

Newby Hall, built in the 1690s by Sir Christopher Wren, was crowned Historic Houses Garden of the Year in 2019. One of Britain's finest Grade 1 listed Adam Houses, Newby Hall, the family home of Mr & Mrs Richard Compton, can be justifiably proud of the award. With much to offer everyone, the Hall and Gardens, set in forty acres alongside the banks of the River Ure near Ripon in North Yorkshire, form part of a 519-acre estate. David Mears was recently invited to meet Newby's newcomer; Head Gardener **Phil Cormie** - on a day the property was closed to the public - and was afforded full access to the gardens

On a gloriously sunny day, and with Covid-19 restrictions eased allowing outdoor opening and catering, the visit timing was most welcome. As I approached the Hall on the long drive passing a lovely church (more later), sheep with their lambs and geese with their young, the path to normality seemed evident! I met Phil Cormie at the Estate Office and I learned that Newby's award-winning gardens, mostly created in the early 1920s, have evolved over the years making a major contribution to 20th century gardening. Current owners Richard and Lucinda Compton ensure this continues. They are very proud of their double herbaceous border which I looked forward to seeing.



So, as we began our walk around the gardens, Phil told me about himself. First, I need to know about Rock On! (This was a press release that had attracted our attention). Born in Whickham near Newcastle, Phil, now thirty-two, had been appointed eighteen months ago as Head Gardener and to lead a major five-year rock garden restoration project. He joined Newby from the nearby Himalayan Garden & Sculpture Park where he worked for four years and previously had spent some time at Edinburgh Zoo. His studies with the Scottish Rural College and time at the Royal Britannic Gardens led him to a degree with honours. I asked what or who had inspired him to take up horticulture. "My dad" he said. "I was four years old when my mum made him buy an

allotment and I loved it; I needed to be outdoors!"

He originally went down the university route taking International Business Studies and French at Aston University in Birmingham. "It just wasn't for me" he said "There was no greenery anywhere!!" Phil pulled out and went to Newcastle College taking a two-year course: National Diploma in Horticulture. The lecturer there, recognising Phil's abilities, persuaded him to take his studies further. "I jumped at it," he said. "I went to Royal Botanic Gardens and obtained a BSc Hons in Horticulture with Plantsmanship. This led to me taking seasonal work for four years at Edinburgh Zoo."

We walked around the Hall and, looking



Double Herbaceous Border (credit Nicola Stocken)

over the lily pond, saw the south front. Then we turned and the famous double herbaceous border was in view. At 172 metres long, Phil said that it is believed to be the longest double herbaceous border in the UK. It certainly is impressive and leads down to the river. It was work in progress at the time of my visit, but Newby kindly provided an image showing it in its full glory.

Flowering perennials include Echinacea, Lythrum and Sanguisorba which mingle with insect friendly Eryngium, Echinops and Veronicastrum. A new, modern colour palette has been incorporated, with plant colour and form carefully chosen by Lucinda Compton, Garden Curator. Softer pastels are strengthened by vibrant lilacs, magenta pink, lime green, claret and silver; all colours

reflected in the trees beyond.

After walking the length of this outstanding feature, we came upon the two shell pavilions, one on either side. These were "shelled" inside by Linda Fenwick at the request of Lucinda. Our photo shows the amazing and intricate design in one, with thousands of shells used.

We moved down steps towards the river Ure and crossed a narrow-gauge railway track. Newby has its own miniature railway that operates every day throughout the season along a 1¼ mile track. There's even a splendid miniature steam loco (Royal Scot) that hauls passengers on Sundays and Bank Holidays! Newby caters for all ages and there's an extensive play area too including pedal boats, rafts and aerial slide.



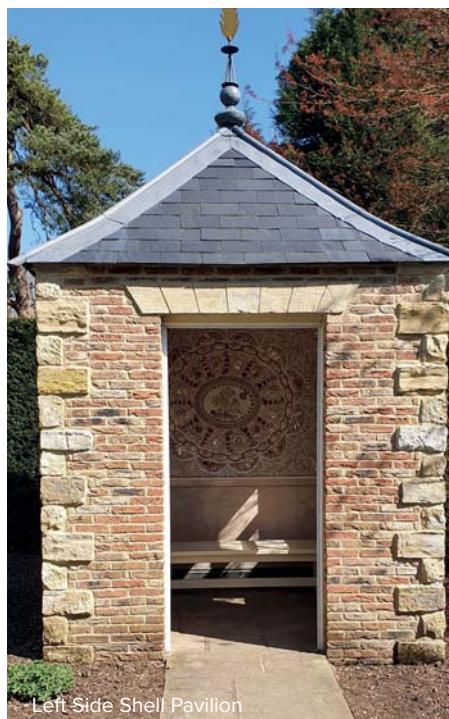
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Head Gardener Phil Cormie



The Water Garden



Left Side Shell Pavilion

Back to our tour, we next visited the Water Garden with its man-made stream and a variety of plants. The Bog Arum is one of the first plants to appear around the pond with its paddle-shaped leaves and this is followed, usually early May, with a profusion of a stunning display of Harlow Carr Primulas.

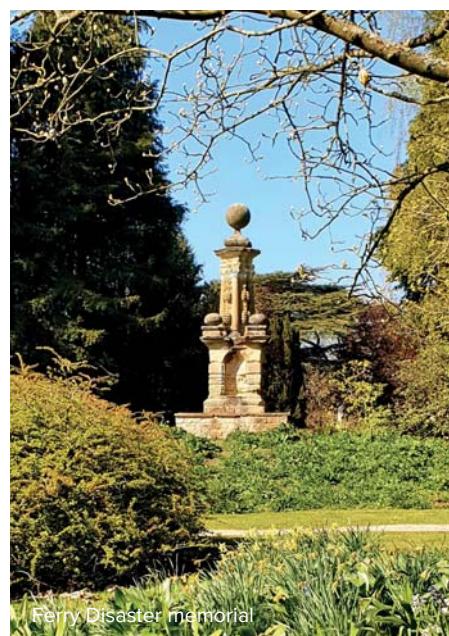
We moved on to the East Rock Garden. Here in early spring, there are Pulmonaria 'Blue Ensign', Brunnera 'Jack Frost' and hundreds of dark 'Havran' Tulips set off against a backdrop of dark earth and white star-shaped Magnolia stellata flowers, and the faintest pink hue of a large Camellia japonica magnolifolia. The dark tulips certainly made impact. Phil said that he liked the colour palette in this garden and that they had retained thirty species.

We ventured next past the Orchard Garden boasting a line of espalier apple trees (Red Sentinel) giving a nod to the art deco period layout. Phil explained that, when the trees had become more established, the metal framework could be removed. The idea of the espalier was to complete the "walled garden" feel but not to totally

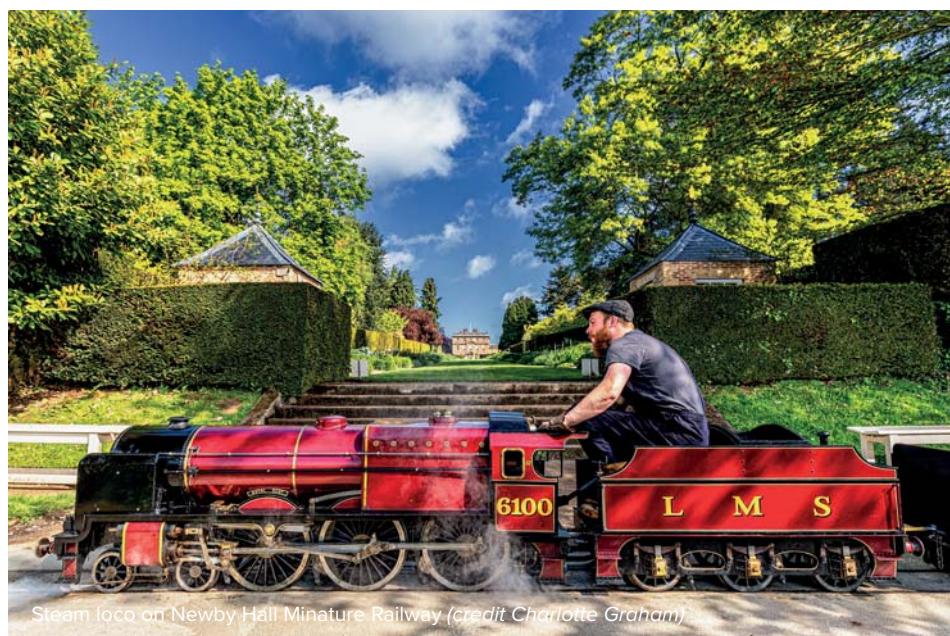
enclose it, so hence the "wall" of apple trees!

As we walked on, we met Tom Kenwood who was busy setting up hazel twig support frames for herbaceous border plants and using traditional skills and materials. He explained that they grow hazel for the specific purpose of producing these supports. The next view we came upon was rather strange and seemed out of place. It looked like an ancient jail cell door set in a wall. It was, in fact just that! It came from Newgate Prison and was on the cell that Jack Sheppard escaped from in 1724. It was acquired purely out of interest by a Vyner ancestor of the family and placed here at Newby in the late 19th century!

As we moved on, we caught a glimpse of the River Ure from a tranquil and sunlit corner of the garden; well worth a photo! Next, we happened upon a compact planting of White Birch trees looking splendid against the blue sky. This led us to what Phil told me was the Ferry Disaster Memorial which commemorates those that died. On 4th February 1869, the York and Ainsty Hunt had reached the banks of the River Ure which



Ferry Disaster memorial



Steam loco on Newby Hall Miniature Railway (credit Charlotte Graham)



Espalier apple trees in the orchard garden

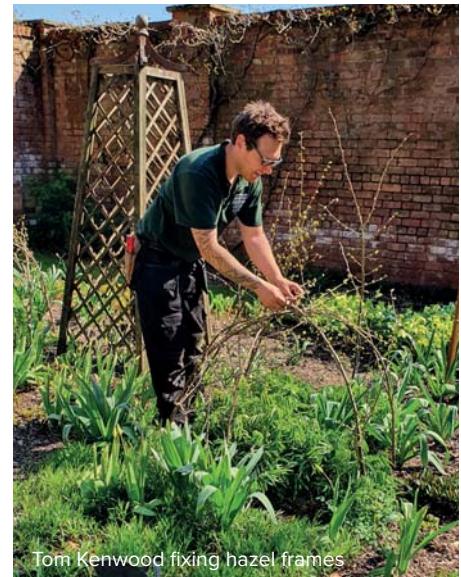
was swollen after heavy rain. Several members boarded the ferry but one of the horses became tangled in the chains on the side of the ferry, panicked and tipped the boat over. Six men were drowned, including Sir Charles Slingsby, the heir to the estates in Knaresborough and Scriven, Captain Henry Vyner and Edmund Robinson - members of the family of Newby Hall. Clare and Robert Vyner were saved. It was a dramatic event which had a considerable impact on the history of estates in the area.

This has a connection to the beautiful church I passed on the way into the estate; Christ the Consoler. It is a memorial to Clare Vyner's brother Frederick Vyner who, age 23, was captured and murdered by brigands in Greece in 1870 before a ransom could be paid. His mother, a year after the ferry disaster, used the money collected for his ransom to commission British architect William Burges to design this church (built 1871-76) in the grounds of her home at Newby Hall.

From the memorial we walked through the Curving Pergola, originally designed to make

an attractive approach to the Rock Garden, with sandstone pillars and cross beams clad with Laburnum (best viewed when in full bloom late May). We were now in the place where Phil was to work on the mammoth five-year restoration project! When Phil first saw the Rock Garden, he could not believe the state it was in. "It was totally overgrown and had fallen into extreme disrepair," he said. The first job to tackle was clearing tons of soil to reveal the rocks buried beneath! Just one problem; there was no way any mechanical equipment could gain access, let alone be used. So began a very labour intensive dig out; and by hand during lock-down! The first phase has recently been completed (shown here). It's a pity not to be able to show what it was like before, but this transformation is amazing, especially judging by the remaining areas to be tackled.

In their publicity, Newby Hall state: 'This is a fascinating and unique garden, both for what it is now and for its future potential. It was once very overgrown and dark, but now it is an area of allure and mystery with many varied paths criss-crossing.' This does sum it



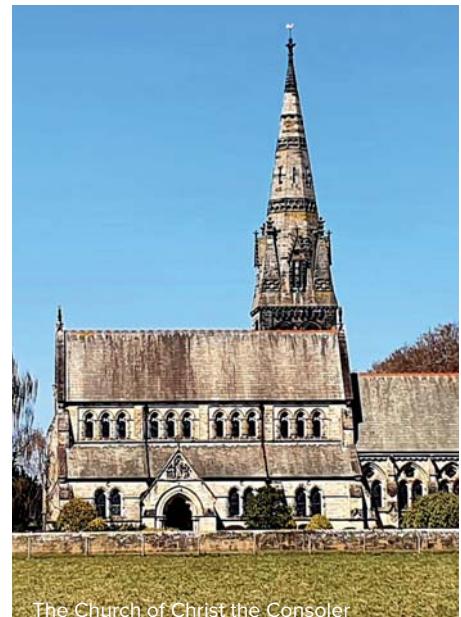
Tom Kenwood fixing hazel frames



Newgate Prison cell door 1724



A glimpse of the River Ure



The Church of Christ the Consoler



It's a great piece of kit, can work at any time of the day or night and is controlled by an App on my mobile phone. The great thing is that they are not as intrusive as motor mowers and are virtually silent



up really well. The Rock Garden as far as is known, as no plans and details survive the period, was completed just before the outbreak of World War One. Work on the garden soon ceased, however, as many of the estate workers "signed up" and went to fight in France. Many, sadly, did not return. This then, is no ordinary rock garden; when we talk about rocks here, we mean huge rocks! It seems that what is hiding below soil level is just as huge as what is visible above ground. Transporting these massive items must have been a Herculean task. They had to be lifted from the River Ure and dragged, and maybe over tree logs, to site for positioning. If you look carefully at some of them, chiselled holes are to be seen. These were made to enable lifting, hauling and manoeuvring.

There are two key features in the middle of the Rock Garden: a waterfall and a lovely old stone bridge. This stone bridge acted as an aqueduct for a number of years carrying water to the house. Then, in 1980, and following the waterfall falling into disuse during World War Two, it carried pumped water to feed the refurbished waterfall.

Phil's comments about the project were:

'Transforming and renovating the rock garden is a huge project and causes quite a dilemma as it's obviously important to retain the spirit of the place. The overgrown tree canopy did give the air of a secret garden, but this caused the herbaceous underplanting to be wiped out due to a lack of sunlight. There are no original plans or planting schemes so we are trying to interpret what we believe to be the original vision for the rock garden – huge rocky outcrops with intimate planting pockets for unusual alpines. By removing some of the tree canopy, we have already started to unveil the scale and drama of the rock faces which are spectacular! It is clear that without drastic action, the Rock Garden would have deteriorated further and would not have been a place to visit.'

Edinburgh consultants Kevock Nursery and Garden Design, specialists in this type of work, have been engaged and are working closely with the garden team to ensure that this splendid area is conserved for future generations. Much of the garden has quite a 'woodsy' feel to it, rather than a more typical open free draining rock garden in full sun. Plants such as Arisaema, Trillium and Podophyllum thrive here. It will be most interesting to see the finished job at the end of this five-year project.

We carried on via the Rose Pergola, which features rambling and climbing roses, to Sylvia's Garden. This was one of the earliest compartmented gardens designed by Major Compton in 1930 and covers the same proportions as an earlier Victorian garden, which it replaced. He named it after his wife, Sylvia Farquharson (later becoming her memorial garden), and it was planted to peak in May (to coincide with York Races). This is such an intimate, romantic and delicate part of the gardens with many feminine colours and hues. "It was designed to reflect that of one of the ceiling plaster panels in the house," Phil says. Providing a perfect backdrop to show off plant colours is a dark yew hedge that is being renovated at present.



As we began our return, I spotted a piece of kit that was quietly going about its business near to the house: A robotic mower. Phil is obviously impressed with these as Newby have three and soon there will be five. As he explains: "It's a great piece of kit, can work at any time of the day or night and are controlled by an App on my mobile phone. The great thing is that they are not as intrusive as motor mowers and are virtually silent; they help enhance the visitor experience." I wondered about re-charging these mowers and Phil explained that, when their cutting programme ends, they simply return to a discreetly placed charging mat and recharge automatically, ready to restart when programmed to do so. From a cutting point of view, it seems that little and often is the programme for these mowers; very impressive and so unobtrusive!

We'd now arrived at the West Front and the original entrance. It was time to cover a few questions. We sat in the sun on a convenient low wall. "So, first, who is in the team?" I asked.

The Gardening Team

Mrs Lucinda Compton took over the curatorship of the gardens from her father-in-law, Robin Compton in 2009. She oversees the vision for the garden and its future along with her talented garden team led by Phil, which comprises:

Edward Round, Senior Gardener. An incredibly talented plantsman, Ed is

responsible for Sylvia's Garden, the Cornus Collection and the Heritage Orchards. He's the man to go to if you want to know about plants.

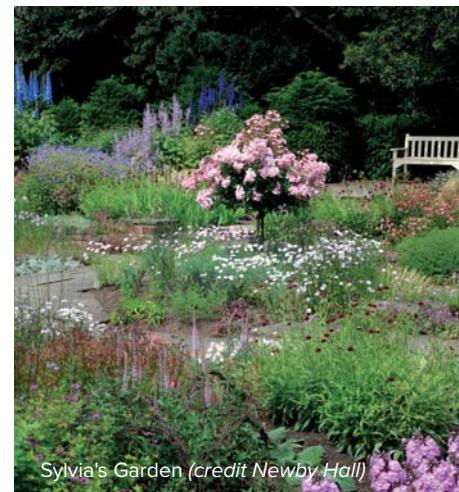
Dave Petherbridge. PGG (Professional Gardeners' Guild) New Gardener of the Year. Used his design skills to produce wonderful maps of the Rock Garden and his artistic flair to maintain the huge double herbaceous border.

Tom Kenwood. Looks after the East Rock Garden, White Garden, Orchard, Water and Tropical Gardens and busy transforming these different garden areas.

Nigel Allison. He's the groundsman with an array of kit who has the job of looking after the trees, grass, hedges and machinery.

Dan Brown. The arboriculturist who, alongside working in the garden, is responsible for looking after Newby's two ornamental woods; Braggett and Icehouse.

Although each team member has areas of responsibility as described above, all can hedge and grass cut, plant, weed etc., i.e. traditional gardening skills. Whilst all the team are trained and ensure H&S and First Aid requirements are met, certain members have specific training and certification for chainsaw work and spraying. At the end of the season (October - April), work will involve bigger groundworks, turf replacement and hedges all cut. There's quite a lot of wear to renovate on certain turfed areas as roughly



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Getting Personal

Phil Cormie - a good barbie and some classic rock would fit the bill!

Who are you? Phil Cormie, Head Gardener at Newby Hall.

Family status? Married to Gabrielle with a very energetic 2-year-old son.

Who's your hero and why? Hero is a strong term. One of my early influences was my dad, who has a real love for gardening and growing veg on the allotment. Nowadays, I'm influenced by people like Fergus Garrett, Noel Kingsbury and Dave Goulson who are trying make our gardens and horticulture techniques more ecologically friendly.

What's your guilty pleasure? Good cheese board with a bottle of wine.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? The past eighteen months leading the team here at Newby Hall.

What are your pet peeves? A messy workshop.

What's the best part of your job? Interacting with the general public and working in a beautiful setting.

... and the worst? Seasonal flooding in the garden; being next to the River Ure, it floods multiple times during the winter months leaving much debris behind.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To play number 8 for the upcoming Lion's tour of South Africa.

What's your favourite sport? Rugby and football.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Led Zeppelin IV (Led Zeppelin), The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars (David Bowie) and Rumours (Fleetwood Mac).

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Buy a 1950's VW Split screen campervan.

What would you consign to Room 101 and why? Dog owners who don't pick up after their animals...not nice when you're strimming!

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Fergus Garrett, Sir Bobby Robson and Sir David



Attenborough (an eclectic mix I admit).

Do you have any bad habits? My wife will say leaving my work boots in the middle of the kitchen floor!

Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?

No ... what can be done will be done and you can't do any more.

What is your favourite film? Lord of The Rings is hard to beat.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? From a previous head gardener I trained under ... to get a garden looking immaculate you have to do all the small things right. It's all about the small details, much of which is overlooked and unseen by the general public, but these small things make all the difference.

What's your favourite smell? A good barbecue on a summer's day.

What do you do in your spare time? Garden ... the classic gardener's response.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Some members of the general public assume the gardens look after themselves in the winter months and the gardeners have a long holiday from November until April.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Stihl MSA161 top handled arborist chainsaw.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Ambitious, hard-working, Geordie.

What talent would you like to have? Ballet dancer just like Billy Elliot.

140,000 folk visit during six months! There are special events held too: Italian Car and Motorcycle Extravaganza 2021, VW Campersite 2021 (successfully launched during 2020 to encourage visitors and comply with Covid-19 regulations), Historic Vehicle Rally 2021 and, for the first time, the Autumn Harrogate Flower Show which everyone is excited about. Each will bring in much needed revenue along with extra work and maintenance afterwards!

There is also a team of ten to twelve volunteers who are involved in a number of significant projects to improve and maintain the gardens at Newby Hall. Volunteers usually work one day a week as a group under the supervision of a member of the Garden Team and enhance their work, e.g. deadheading. Additionally, "We recently took on Meg for the summer," said Phil. "She had been here on a placement and realised there was an opportunity!"

Extra help for the gardening team isn't often required, but contractors will be brought in for large groundworks; digging out the Swan Pond for example. The soil profile changes across the site: sandy near to the river, otherwise heavy clay. Maintenance techniques involve adding as much organic matter as possible mostly, but striking a happy medium is important.

Presentation ranks very highly at Newby and as Phil said: "It's what the public pay for!"

Budgeting is not a strict affair at Newby for Phil. He is trusted to purchase what he

needs to carry out the gardens work on a day-to-day basis. Naturally, if any items of large kit are required, then he needs to submit these to the land agent for approval. The budget for his major rock garden project is not an issue, he told me; "I have a good budget for that!" The Rock garden is Phil's main project, and will be for some time, but the double herbaceous border referred to earlier has been another, involving plant lifting and redesign.

Machinery is usually purchased as required from Ripon Farm Services (RFS); very close by! As Phil said: "They provide us with an excellent service and can keep us going if we have a machine down!" Very little machinery hire is necessary apart from 360 diggers and dumper trucks from time to time. Newby have a mechanic on site who handles day to day jobs but RFS carry out major servicing. The inevitable question then came: "What item is on your wish list?" "A 90 hp tractor," was Phil's prompt reply!

As for pests and diseases, Phil said that Honey Fungus was their main issue. This affects trees and woody plants. "You can take a diseased tree out but roots remain to cause problems," Phil says. Fortunately, not all trees and plants are affected as many are resistant to this fungus. Those resistant include: bamboo, box, hornbeam, flowering quince, clematis, cotinus, hawthorn, beech, holly, hebe, London plane, oak, false acacia, lime (*Tilia*), silver and Douglas fir and yew.



Newby Hall East Front from main drive

Rabbits can be a nuisance and are shot when spotted, moles are trapped. There are not too many problems with other pests. Weed control is undertaken using Glyphosphate on footpaths, but biological solutions, such as ladybirds and nematodes, are used elsewhere and in glasshouses mainly. Flora and fauna are highly rated and managed as naturally as possible. This is aided by reduced machine use where practical. Consideration has been given to ecology and the environment too. For example, wildflower planting is ongoing, rainwater is harvested from the glasshouses roofs and certain areas of the grounds are deliberately left as meadows. Environmental legislative compliance includes waste management services and bunded fuel storage. I understand that Phil is looking at a water recycling system for machinery wash-off too.

Covid-19 has affected Newby along with so many others. All the team were furloughed at first lock-down, except Phil, so he needed to prioritise essential work. One important task was to carry on propagation work to ensure plants would become available when needed. As would be expected, some winter work suffered. Gradually, as restrictions started to ease, staff began to return and the team are now up to full strength again. "I think it will be another year before we've properly caught up." said Phil.

I asked if there had been any benefits from the Covid-19 restrictions and lack of visitors. "One of the positives is we were able to carry out much more mulching, and the others were we kept watering and the weeds down!" I heard from Phil, as I often do from others, that folk in this industry feel undervalued and sometimes ill-equipped. "The move to embrace technology has been slow" he says, "the old ways are not always the best!" Good PR helps to raise their profile and Newby's website certainly shows the gardens to good effect too. Securing the Harrogate Flower Show will have advantages also and being voted Historic Houses Garden of the Year in 2019 raised the teams'

profile and pride!

We returned to the Estate Office where I'd finish my visit with a brief chat with Alex Morrison, Assistant Estate Manager. It had been suggested that I spoke to him about the huge land drainage project which he oversaw, so Phil handed me over and bade farewell. Alex explained that the Victorian land drainage throughout the park had been nearing the end of its life and wasn't performing. Intense use of the main area was presenting many problems as it became totally soaked. So, in order to maintain the grounds and be able to attract more events, the decision had been taken to replace the whole system. Newby used a consultant, Miles Flather of LDC, and a local contractor, Matthew of Hullah Contractors, for the project.

LDC carried out the design and, in the summer of 2019, the work commenced. They were blessed with good weather and all was completed within two months. "The contractor was very efficient" said Alex. "It's working very well and has survived massive downpours; first class! The prospect of holding the Harrogate Flower Show this autumn, helped to push this project up the list!"

We spoke about the garden tour and I mentioned the robotic mowers and automatic recharging. Alex then told me that the electricity to power the recharging is free and comes from Newby's own semi-compact hydroelectric plant! This is located on the River Ure and is an Archimedes Screw design providing a maximum of 99kW. What power is not used on mower charging goes back to the Grid.

Newby Hall is certainly embracing new technology now, ensuring sustainability and with a care for the environment.



Alex Morrison, Assistant Estate Manager



One of the robotic mowers in action



South Front looking over the lily pond

What's in the shed?

Grass work

Husqvarna P525D with 155cm mulching deck. 1.5 inch cut height for large formal areas

Stihl iMow RMI 632 - on trial from Ripon Farm Services. Looking to increase the amount of areas cut with robotic mowers to allow groundsman more time to create more fine turf areas in the garden

Weibang 56 Pro roller mower 3.6cm cut height - for small formal areas around borders and main hall

Wessex 145 WFM Flail Mower tractor mounted for orchards and meadow areas.

Stihl FS460 brushcutters

Tractors

Kubota STW40 with front loader and 3

tonne trailer

Kioti CS2610 compact tractors x 2 with 2 tonne trailers

Leaf Clearance

Stihl BR800 blowers

Billy Goat Debris loader

Chainsaws

Stihl MS441 with 20 inch bar

Stihl MS241 with 14 inch bar

Stihl MS161T with 12 inch bar

Hedgecutters

Stihl HSA94R electric

Stihl HSA94T electric

Stihl HSA86

Stihl HLA85 long reach



White Birch trees

TurfTank

Covering all Bases

Professional sports turf maintenance is no stranger to advancements in technology changing the way work is done. Over the past decade, there have been machinery developments, lighting rigs, turf management software and the electrification of vehicles and mowers





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During furlough, we had one member of staff marking, and it took him all day to mark one pitch out on his own from scratch because he was up and down with his tape measure and stringing lines but, with the Turf Tank, it takes twenty-five minutes to mark a pitch and you can repeat as often as you want

Over the last four years, the newest introduction has seen fully autonomous line markers, such as the Turf Tank One, enter the industry. This linemarking machine combines the best of all the recent advancements by using battery power and a global navigation satellite system (GNSS) receiver coupled with a real-time kinetic (RTK) base station which greatly increases the accuracy.

Base stations are commonly used in agriculture and surveying due to their precision. Other methods, such as GNSS with GPS used in smartphones, have accuracy that make them suitable for applications like Google Maps, but they lack the accuracy needed for initial marking or overmarking that can be found using the Turf Tank robot.

After all, accuracy is everything in linemarking, and this is what makes the base station so crucial in the process. An RTK base station improves the accuracy of the robot (rover) by providing it with real-time correction data accurate to +/- 1 centimetre. This means a GPS receiver capable of RTK takes in the normal signals from the GNSS along with a correction stream to achieve 1cm positional accuracy.

Compared to other autonomous

linemarkers, the base station allows the Turf Tank robot to be operated without needing an expensive external cellular provider and, because the source of the correctional data is on your pitch, you don't have to worry about being too far away from the network and losing signal. The Turf Tank robot will always be localised with perfect precision, no matter where you are on the planet.

Getting this high level of accuracy using a base station was developed for surveying and plotting sites where accuracy is equally important. The same principles are used to map out pitches and store them with the Turf Tank, which means by putting the base station back into the same place a week, month or year after marking, you'll still get the same accurate pitch.

Whilst all of the tech specs read well on paper, the natural reaction is to question how well it performs in the field. A recent open day at Nottingham Forest Football Club's Nigel Doughty Academy - who have their own Turf Tank - displayed the accuracy and speed promised, an 11-a-side pitch in twenty-five minutes, which is significantly faster than the estimated two hours it would take two people. With that performance, the labour-saving aspect of the robot cannot be questioned.



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I think using it was quite daunting to start with because there's a lot of options in there of things you can edit, but when you get your head around it, it's quite self-explanatory and straightforward



But, away from the pristine carpets of Championship football, contractors such as Premier Pitches and Countrywide Grounds Maintenance are using their own robots with the more traditional challenges of uneven surfaces and moving from site to site each day.

As a Sports Turf Contractor at Premier Pitches, Liam Reynolds has been hands-on with the robot since April 2021 and, in that time, has trained staff from their early twenties to mid-fifties on the new technology.

"The central core of the business is sports turf renovations, but then we have a lot of ground maintenance contracts between August and April," Liam explains. "So that is looking after anything from grassroots football and rugby up to semi-professional football. It's grass cutting, linemarking, spraying selective herbicides - low level general grounds maintenance but providing them with a high standard of service."

"We are currently contracted to maintain twenty pitches, two rugby pitches and eighteen football pitches. So, to do the initial marking, we'd need anything between three and five people going out and marking from scratch and, after that, it's at least two people once a week going around the twenty pitches overmarking them."

"We'd looked at the Turf Tank a couple of years ago, and then our attention got diverted onto other parts of the business, and we went away from the idea. But, with furlough and Covid hitting last year, I and one of the directors, John Woolfall, looked at it in a bit more depth to ease the workload on staff."

"We got in touch with Matt at Turf Tank, and he came out and did a demonstration for us, and for how quickly he went to one of the pitches, found the sockets, put in the dimensions and then marked it out almost from scratch - that sold it in itself to us. We'd be using three people for three or four hours to mark it out from scratch, but he had it done in three-quarters of an hour and then, when you times that by twenty - especially for the initial marks - it is a significant saving."

"During furlough, we had one member of staff marking, and it took him all day to mark one pitch out on his own from scratch because he was up and down with his tape measure and stringing lines but, with the Turf Tank, it takes twenty-five minutes to mark a pitch and you can repeat as often as you want. You put the GPS where it needs to be, and the robot knows where the pitches are, and it's a 25-minute job in the future."

"It's been very accurate for what we want to do. Week on week, you put the base station in the exact same place, and you can see to almost a millimetre that the robot is following the same line as what it put down last week."

"I think using it was quite daunting to start with because there's a lot of options in there of things you can edit, but when you get your head around it, it's quite self-explanatory and straightforward. There's plenty of options in there that you can edit any part of a template that you like and add segments in or take bits out."

"We've got people that work from their early twenties up to their mid-fifties, and they all seem to have grasped it on the first attempt. I think the younger ones grasp the technology quicker. If we had to use it to mark something we hadn't before, like an athletics track, I think the younger ones would be more likely to explore the software. Still, it is simple enough that anybody in the company now is capable and confident of picking up the tablet and going out."

"By the time they have set out four or five pitches, it's then just a routine, and they know what they are doing, and it is just a routine and a process. So, as complicated as it looks, it is so self-explanatory in the same way, and I think for people in their fifties to pick the tablet up and, after a day of tuition, go out and use it without any problems says itself how simple it can be."

"What we are now looking at from a contracting side is offering an initial marking service. So, if we went to a football club, let's say to someone's training ground, the first year we went there, we'd put all the pitches



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Schools can be quite unique sites where they have to cater for several different sports in the same area, and often that will mean reconfiguring markings to fit the space

out for them where they wanted them, and the next year it's just a case of putting the base station in the same place and instructing the robot to mark the pitches out. So, hopefully, that's something that we can pick up a bit of work with."

"We don't want to take the groundsmen's job away from them, but just aid them when they've got a few days of man-hours setting out all these pitches from scratch, we can turn up at the beginning of the season, set the pitches out and then hand them back to the groundsmen. Then, once the lines are down, it's easier to follow them and keep the pitches in place where they are."

"One thing we did stress to the staff at Premier Pitches was we weren't getting it to replace anybody; we were getting it as an extra member rather than a replacement. So the robot is a member of staff, and its job is to mark the pitches out and, whilst it's doing that, it allows the other members to do other bits of work on the sites that, in the past, either hasn't been done or have been a low priority because the priority is the pitches."

"We will use it for overmarking on our own contracts, but it allows the person that is initially marking to go out and do other jobs whilst keeping an eye on the robot. They can do some litter picking, strim banks and jobs like that."

"It gives people that bit of extra time, and we can give the pitches that bit of extra care. It improves the quality of service that we can offer our existing clients, so rather than us just going and marking the pitch out, whilst it's marking, we can tidy the site up and make it cleaner and tidier and go into that extra detail."

Providing the extra detail isn't exclusive to Premier Pitches. Like them, Countrywide Grounds Maintenance have used the robot to expand their offering. Having the option of athletics tracks, American football, lacrosse and baseball in addition to football and rugby has meant the company can offer their services for a broader range of sports. Being able to grow using the capabilities of the Turf Tank is one thing, but they also use the robot

to tailor markings to the specific needs of each site.

Adrian Sargent, Regional Manager for Countrywide Grounds Maintenance Ltd - Wiltshire, explains: "Schools can be quite unique sites where they have to cater for several different sports in the same area, and often that will mean reconfiguring markings to fit the space."

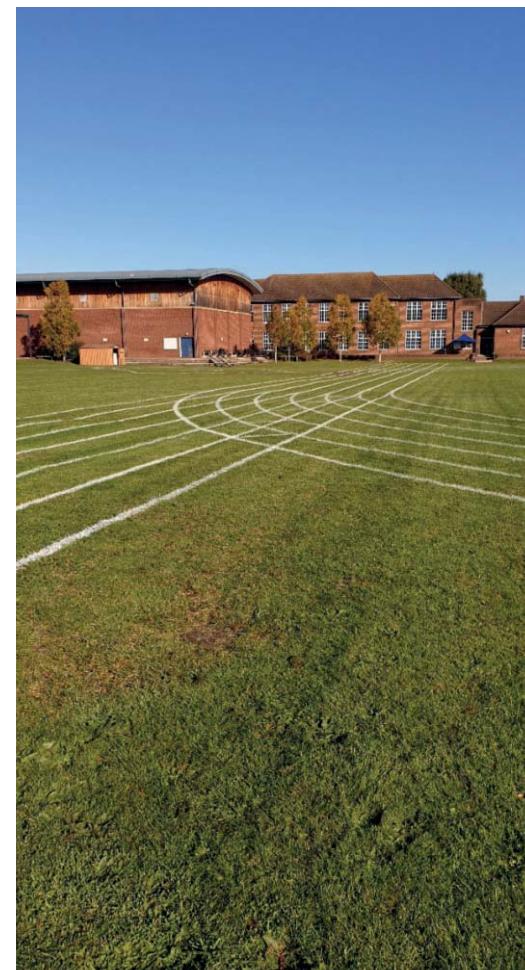
"We've seen this, especially in the summer when it comes to marking out for athletics and, with one person taking responsibility for all the marking, we wanted to lighten his load but not sacrifice on the quality. For us, that was the primary thing and, before we looked at what the market had to offer, I'd already decided I wanted a robot that came with a base station."

"For me, it's essential if you want to achieve the accuracy and consistency we need, and there were no other manufacturers out there that could match it. We tested the Turf Tank, and the performance was excellent. The speed was what we were told, pitches were marked out quickly, and the reduction of paint usage was also in line with what we expected."

"Currently, we're using it to mark two schools a day, and that's the initial setups for a 300m 6 lane oval and rounders pitches, followed by a 400m six-lane oval and rounders, but we are looking to increase this to three in the next season."

"Come September, we will be marking, football, rugby, hockey, and schools are also looking at more unusual sports such as lacrosse and baseball and, because of the versatility of the robot, we can cater for that."

For those that use it, the Turf Tank is clearly a tool to improve their efficiency and output rather than a reason to reduce the number of staff. Ultimately, like most machines in this trade, it is a tool that still needs human interaction to make it work, but it can operate with impressive consistency to do a job, like so many others, that always needs to be done.



Frank Newberry

Survival and Success at Work Meetings

In Part 1 of this article, Turfcare Sector Trainer and Conference Speaker **Frank Newberry** offered advice on making a good impression, dealing with our fears and preparing thoroughly. In Part 2, Frank suggests what to say and when to say it at a work meeting

Part 2: What to say and when to say it

Assuming, for the moment, that this is your first meeting - what to say first? Well, if you do not know exactly when it is your turn to speak, always be prepared to say something positive at the start of your comments.

For example, I find it helps if you thank the meeting leader or Chair and indicate that 'it is great to be with you today'. If people do not know you, it might help to introduce yourself. I find, in these situations, it is best to start off speaking slightly slower than in your normal conversation. It indicates a serious intent on your part and people can tune their hearing to your accent and volume.

It also sounds rather professional to pay tribute to a previous speaker (whether you agree with the person or not). You might say 'I would like to build on what Jo just said'. This technique could help you to build important alliances.

If there are people from different departments, please keep your use of technical terms to a minimum and try to use their vocabulary (not your own). If you have to use technical terms, then offer to give an explanation and an indication of the importance of the issue to your work.

Concisely cover the ground you have agreed with your boss (and the Chair) and stick to your item(s) on the meeting agenda.

Say what you can do, before you say what you cannot do,

When people in the meeting make requests of you or your department, always say what

you can do, before you say what you cannot do, then repeat what you can do. Strive to end each contribution you make in a positive way. You will then come across to others as a 'can do' rather than a 'can't do' person. This might reflect well on you and your department.

Be specific and you will sound sincere when praising and thanking people. Avoid general statements like 'that's great'. Use specific statements like 'it was great to get that customer feedback from you, much appreciated'.

One persuasive technique is to say what you have to say using 'triples'. A triple might be as



simple as concisely saying three things in support of your position on a particular matter, or answering questions with three points, or concluding your remarks with three points of emphasis.

There is evidence to suggest that, when we use a 'triple' in a statement, the listeners seem to feel more satisfied that you have thought things through, whereas just one point has to be perfect and could be seen as being right or wrong by some listeners. Two points are maybe not quite enough to persuade, and four points might be too many for any of them to be memorable. The three points you make might be just right for you in a meeting setting.

When to say it

When should you speak? When invited to by the Chair, even if others are talking but not waiting their turn to speak. Maintain eye contact with the Chair when there are silences and when more than one person is speaking at a time. This will build the Chair's confidence in you as being someone who values orderly meetings. Always speak 'through the Chair' (starting with 'I agree Chairman, or 'thank you Chair' etc.) rather like MPs do with 'Mr Speaker' in parliamentary debates and Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs).

If you are not invited to speak, but you want to say something, then put your hand up (to about head height) and wait patiently - keeping your hand up.

Start when there is a gap in the debate or an unexpected silence.



Be specific and you will sound sincere when praising and thanking people. Avoid general statements like 'that's great'. Use specific statements like 'it was great to get that customer feedback from you, much appreciated'

You may wish to offer to Chair the meeting

Hopefully, your work meetings will always be run in an orderly manner, and you will know when it is your turn to speak. In my experience, it is good to have mainly informal work meetings at which people are relaxed, open and honest.

This may not always be the case. The Chairperson of the meeting may be late arriving, unexpectedly absent, or they may be new to the role and unfamiliar with how the meeting has run in the past.

If the Chair is running late, you may wish to offer to Chair the meeting for a while. You will find detailed advice on the key aspects of 'Making the Most of Meetings at Work' in three articles (with this title) that I wrote for Pitchcare magazine in 2012 (issues 43, 44 and 45).

You may well have to interrupt to make your point

If you are not invited to speak during the meeting - and there are no silences - you may well have to interrupt to make your point. This can be done reasonably painlessly by using the 'validation' technique.

It has been observed that even the most domineering people at meetings will allow an interruption if they think the interrupter agrees with them, wants to validate their point, or praise their ideas.

All you have to do is make eye contact with



All you have to do is make eye contact with the domineering speaker and raise your hand to acclaim him or her. Interrupt them by saying quite loudly something like, 'I agree, we need straight talking on this matter'. Then quickly make your point

(putting your hand on your heart). 'Can I just check around the table if I am alone in this? Is it just me?' Involving others will help them to commit to your ideas or requests. We need to be seen as asking and not telling people what to do.

The debate on this topic may fizzle out or continue to a conclusion. Try to be the last to speak in debates of importance to you and, just to be sure, offer to take some action points (tasks to be done) for yourself to do.

Take the action points that impact on you. You could also get involved in the action points of people you want to impress or get closer to in your world of work.

So, good luck with what to say and when to say it! In Part 3 of this article we will look at:

- Where to sit at work meetings
- What not to say at work meetings
- How to deal with difficult people at a work meeting

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the domineering speaker and raise your hand to acclaim him or her. Interrupt them by saying quite loudly something like, 'I agree, we need straight talking on this matter'. Then quickly make your point.

Involving others will help them to commit to your ideas

After you have made your point, you might want to quickly say; 'that's only my view'

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Machinery and Supplies

Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



Toro has launched a new Demonstration and Support Trailer. The company says this will allow them to bring products closer to the customer for real-life demonstrations.

A whole range of Toro machinery can be on board and the manufacturer says the trailer will offer them a new, professional and secure way to transport and showcase their products.

As well as taking equipment for demonstrations or being dropped off for a trial period, the trailer will also be used for trade shows.

Sales manager Matthew Coleman said, "I am excited to get the trailer and Toro products out on the road in 2021, delivering demonstrations and trials to customers new and existing. It's great to be able to visit customers again and see how Toro can support their landscaping and turf care needs face-to-face."

www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk

Occasionally an ingeniously simple machine comes along which becomes instantly indispensable. Welcome the Maredo STrac 700, a pedestrian power unit which supports four different groundcare operations - scarifying, aeration, seeding and fraise mowing with more to come.

The 'access-all-areas' STrac 700 is light, fast and versatile. Suddenly, even on difficult undulations, there is scope to provide uniformity of care and presentation across a whole site. It can be used on all turf surfaces from bowling greens to full size pitches and for challenging areas like the collars of a golf course, or where a tractor is too heavy.

Brought to you via your local Wiedenmann UK dealer, the STrac 700 has easy controls on the guiding handle and a set of inter-changeable heads. A very short turning radius means the rear wheels can adopt a variety of operating positions, while the tools connect effortlessly, cassette style.

Maredo offers four tool types, each purchased separately with working widths of 65cm:

- The ST200 Flex-Verticutter scarifies to 25mm using carbide tipped blades with tool free adjustment. The blades counter rotate against the direction of travel so material is

Extending the EVO concept of more powerful bite, torque and throughput, GreenMech's 8" EVO 205D delivers even greater performance to tackle the biggest tasks with reliability and ease.

At the heart of the 205D woodchipper's design is a Stage V compliant 50hp Kubota Diesel engine which can process up to 25 cubic metres of material per hour, making it one of the most productive machines in its category. GreenMech's new 'Smart Sense' controller provides 'no-stress' overload protection and automatic load detection to ensure optimised performance and fuel consumption. A new, generous in-feed hopper measuring 1250mm x 700mm allows for the free-flow of bulky brash and timber, gathered and gripped by the twin horizontal hydraulic rollers and fed to the heavy, six-disc blade flywheel, which offers unparalleled processing power.

Strength and durability in construction is provided by the deep beam, high tensile steel chassis, together with an all-steel hinged and lined bonnet, making the EVO one of the



quietest chippers on the market. All major grease points have also been centralised to make the ongoing maintenance of the machine quick and convenient.

As standard, the EVO 205D comes with GreenMech's Disc-Blade chipping technology, a three year, no-quibble parts and labour warranty and the unrivalled support of their nationwide dealer network.

www.greenmech.co.uk

Collaboration sees new pro battery range. It has been announced that high grass specialist AS-Motor and the cordless specialist EGO have worked together on AS-Motor's next generation of battery powered high grass mowers.

Known as the new 'Electric' product line, AS-Motor and EGO are launching their first cross-brand and cross-manufacturer battery platform range of mowers and weed removers for the professional sector.

The new 'Electric' line is powered by the recently developed EGO Power Unit, which draws its energy from the EGO 56V ARC lithium battery range.

The manufacturers say their cooperation offers professional users an increased range of applications of battery powered tools. From EGO's own hedge trimmers, leaf blowers, chainsaws, brushcutters and mowers to the inclusion of new product families from AS-Motor to include professional mowers, mulching lawn mowers, weed removers and high grass mowers.

In the UK, the AS-Motor range is distributed by



PSD Groundscare. Managing Director Chris Gibson said, "The expansion of the range of battery powered equipment with extended run times will provide our customers and dealers with high performance professional low noise machines that produce zero emissions and lower hand arm vibration. This means they're a win-win for customers, operators and the environment that we can't wait to get demonstrating to our customers".

egopowerplus.co.uk





STIHL has launched the new HLA 135, the most robust and powerful cordless long-reach hedge trimmer in its offering, ideal for commercial applications and trimming and pruning back large hedgerows, especially in noise sensitive environments.

Weighing just 5.6kg (without battery), the STIHL HLA 135 is 249cm in length and features 600mm double-sided, double-edged universal blades that can cut through 16-18mm branches. The cutter bar can be rotated through 145° via the lightweight magnesium gearbox to enable overhead, side and ground-level cutting.

A new, more comfortable control handle boasts three-speed pre-selection levels through an LED display, enabling operators to alter their working speed to the necessary conditions, whilst optimising battery-working time. Maximum stroke rate is an impressive 4000rpm, perfect for leaving a smooth finish on conifers.

Other features include a soft loop handle and grip shaft, RTS harness eyelet and mesh air filter. When used in conjunction with STIHL's AP 200 battery system, the HLA 135 has a run time of up to 64 minutes.

www.stihl.co.uk.



Charterhouse Turf Machinery has officially rebranded to become Redexim. While the product portfolio, premises and personnel will be unaffected, the change of name brings the UK into line with the Redexim corporate strategy adopted throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

The relationship between Charterhouse and Redexim has been ongoing for more than 35 years, when Charterhouse were appointed to distribute the now iconic Redexim Verti-Drain®. The success of this partnership then saw Charterhouse become a wholly owned subsidiary of Redexim bv in 1997. With the Verti-Drain® firmly setting the standard for professional aeration, the product portfolio has expanded significantly over the years to incorporate overseeders, topdressers, scarifiers and renovation equipment for natural surfaces, as well as a range of machinery options for artificial playing surfaces, that meet the exacting standards of today's turf managers.

Commenting on the re-brand in the UK, Redexim Chief Operating Officer Herman de Bree said "The time is now right to unify the approach with that adopted throughout the world by delivering sales, service and support under the Redexim banner. This will help to strengthen our brand awareness and global corporate identity and streamline our communication with customers around the world."

www.redexim.com

The TurfPod is developed in line with SGL founder Nico van Vuuren's strong belief that data is a basic necessity for every groundsman and greenkeeper: "Every playing surface is different, every climate is different, and every budget is different. There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to managing grass. Every turf manager, in all levels of sport, should be able to respond to the ever changing conditions and make well informed decisions during their daily work and the challenges they face. The only way to do that is with data, so our goal is to make that possible."

Flexibility has been the key in reaching accessibility. SGL supply the TurfPod as a flexible lease, starting at €49 a month, hardware and software included. Customers can upgrade the software whenever they please, with a wide range of TurfModules, such as data analyses and visualisations.

"We understand that groundsmen and greenkeepers need flexibility," says Van Vuuren. "Therefore we enable them to configure their SGL Portal with the information that is relevant to them. This modular approach enables, for example, very detailed reporting on a stadium pitch, but only the essential information for the training pitches. Or the possibility to add a Disease Forecast during high pressure months and turn it off for the rest of the year."

The TurfPod is a completely customisable monitoring tool, fit to every budget, sport and situation.

www.sglsystem.com/turfpod



Data driven decisions usually result in a higher grass quality and more efficient use of resources. Yet, many clubs do not have the budget to make big investments in monitoring equipment. Over the past years, SGL have been working towards a solution to make monitoring technology accessible to everyone. They now launch an all-in-one tool that is affordable and user friendly to lower leagues and, at the same time, offers advanced possibilities to the highest levels of sport: the SGL TurfPod.

The TurfPod is a small device containing six sensors that track the essential growing conditions above ground and in the soil. When pinned into the soil, the TurfPod operates automatically and shows the microclimate data in real time on the SGL Portal. This information can be used to, among other things, make decisions on fertiliser, irrigation and supplemental lighting.

For many years, turf professionals have been choosing Dennis Mowers for their superb cut quality and reliability.

Leaving no stone unturned, Dennis Mowers spent over three years working with carefully selected partners to develop a range of quality battery-powered equipment.

The Dennis E-Series range currently consists of three products:



ES-860

Users of the Dennis G860 cylinder mower will no doubt see familiarities in the new ES-860. This 34" battery powered turf management system delivers maximum versatility and the range of 13 interchangeable cassette options provide a solution to many day-to-day maintenance tasks such as cutting, scarifying and brushing. The power of the battery system ensures the machine is capable of cutting at least two pitches on a single charge or verticutting a full pitch without anxiety. Furthermore, current G860 cassettes will also fit the ES-860, meaning that customers will not have to purchase additional cassettes, reducing initial costs and allowing for a simple and easy change from petrol to battery machines.

ES-34R

The ES-34R rotary mower has twin contra rotating blades with the height of cut controlled by an easy to use 'click' system. Suction and blade speed can be adapted to meet the most challenging collection conditions. The mower is also available with optional front wheels, smooth or wiele roller, has excellent sight lines and cuts approximately two pitches on a single charge.



ES-36

Based on the Dennis Premier, the ES-36 provides a perfect finish every time. The envied Dennis stripes are easy to achieve which is also helped by a 3-section rear roller. The powerful battery system allows the addition of a trailer seat to be attached and still achieve a minimum of 20km of cutting. A uniquely developed micro adjuster makes it very easy to set the bottom blade to cylinder.

The machines feature a robust LCD keypad screen which provides the operator with a multitude of information options including speed, clip rate, service checks, lifetime running reports and battery information. The E-Series range of mowers take just 2 hours for an ultra-fast full battery recharge utilising a British 110A battery and will help turf professionals meet sustainability and carbon neutral goals.

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OFFSIDE



UK golf club to install a toboggan run

A Nottinghamshire golf club has been granted permission to build a 120-metre toboggan run on its grounds.

Leen Valley Golf Club will also build an 18-hole adventure golf course, with information



boards and landscaping installed to celebrate a local mining heritage.

The toboggan run, constructed on a natural slope near the 137-space car park and existing clubhouse, will follow a zig-zag route, descending downwards using artificial liners before dismounting at the bottom of the slope. It will be accompanied by a pathway to provide access back to the start of the run.

Both facilities have been put forward as the club looks to make its grounds "more attractive to customers" of all ages.



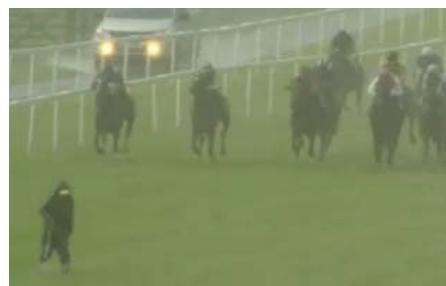
The toughest, weirdest race you've never heard of

Think you can run 4.16666 miles in an hour? Probably. Could you do it again the following hour? Quite possibly. How about the hour after that? The legs might be feeling it by now.

It's hard to say exactly how long you'll be running for - because this race only finishes when there's one person left standing.

The trouble is, some runners can keep going for quite a long time. The current record - held by a Belgian dentist - is 75 hours, or 312 miles.

Welcome to Big Dog's Backyard Ultra, held in Tennessee, the toughest race you've never heard of. I think I will pass on this!



The dangers are clear though and it is a minor miracle no one; horse, jockey or groundsman were injured.

Dopey groundsman

There were recent reports labelling a groundsman 'dopey' as he failed to see thirteen horses charging at him mid-race.

As the rain-battered down at Sandown Park, the horses charged down the straight at 35mph and the groundsman was shown ambling through the centre of the track.

Quite how he had no idea a race had started is a mystery. But, fortunately, he saw them just in the nick of time, jumping into action and sprinting out of harm's way.

A slippery pitch invader in Russia

There was an unexpected visitor to a Russian Premier League match recently, as a snake in the grass entered the home

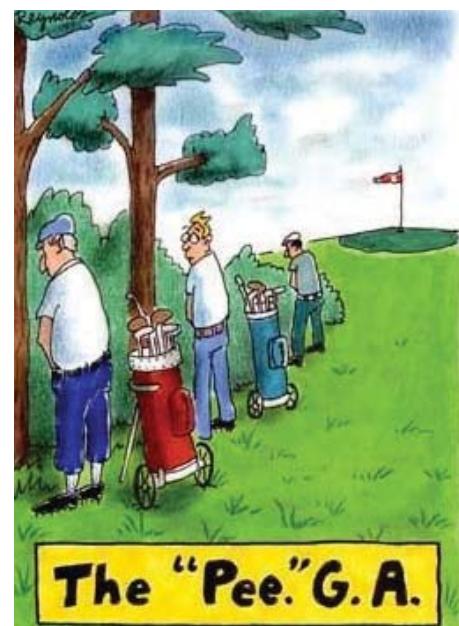


box, tried to evade stadium staff and forced a referee to temporarily stop the action at Chechnya's Akhmat Arena.

Little more than six minutes of the top-flight league match had been played when the ophidian intruder was spotted lurking deep inside the penalty area. A man wearing an accreditation lanyard around his neck ventured onto the turf in an attempt to deal with the slippery situation - to no avail.

In a flourish of skill and control, that the most adroit of playmakers would be proud of, a member of the grounds team entered the fray and scooped the snake up on a pitchfork.

VAR confirmed the snake was clearly offside.



As seen on social media ...



Camels were reported to be wandering the fairways looking for water at Shiskine Golf Club, Isle of Arran.

When you go to cut a club's ground and someone's left the line marker out.



DIARY DATES

SEPTEMBER

2nd: Horseracing - Racing League Race Day, Newcastle (newcastle-racecourse.co.uk)

2nd-6th: Cricket - England v India, 4th Test, The Oval (icc-cricket.com)

4th-6th: Golf - Solheim Cup in Toledo, Ohio (solheimcup.com)

10th-14th: Cricket - England v India, 5th Test, Old Trafford (icc-cricket.com)

14th-16th: Horseracing - Eastern Festival, Great Yarmouth (greatyarmouth-racecourse.co.uk)

24th-26th: Golf - Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits, Wisconsin (rydercup.com)

27th-1st Oct: Cricket - Bob Willis Trophy final, Lord's (lords.org)

29th: Horseracing - Floodlit racing, Kempton Park (thejockeyclub.co.uk/kempton)

OCTOBER

8th-9th: Horseracing - Dubai Future Champions Festival, New Market (thejockeyclub.co.uk/newmarket)

9th: Rugby League - Super League Grand Final at Old Trafford (superleague.co.uk)

16th: Horseracing - QIPCO British Champions Day, Ascot (ascot.co.uk)

18th-15th Nov: Cricket - Men's T20 World Cup in India (icc-cricket.com)

23rd-27th Nov: Rugby League - World Cup, St James' Park, Newcastle (men's, women's and wheelchair tournaments) (rlwc2021.com)

29th: Horseracing - Floodlit racing, Kempton Park (thejockeyclub.co.uk/kempton)

30th-27th Nov: Rugby Union - autumn internationals (autumn-internationals.co.uk/2021)

NOVEMBER

3rd-4th: GMA Saltex - NEC Birmingham (gmasaltex.co.uk)

12th-14th: Horseracing - The Open – The November Meeting, Cheltenham (thejockeyclub.co.uk/cheltenham)

15th: Football - World Cup qualifying final group games: San Marino v England; Northern Ireland v Italy; Scotland v Denmark (fifa.com)

16th: Football - World Cup qualifying final group games: Wales v Belgium (fifa.com)

23rd-8th Jan: Cricket - Australia v England five-Test Ashes series (australia.com)

26th-27th: Horseracing - The Ladbrokes Winter Carnival, Newbury (newburyracecourse.co.uk)

27th: Rugby League - World Cup Final, Old Trafford, Manchester (rlwc2021.com)

29th: Horseracing - Wolverhampton Dunstall Park (wolverhampton-racecourse.co.uk)

To have your event included in this magazine diary section, please email details to kerry@pitchcare.com

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"When we arrived from Brazil, there was no one who could tell us apart. You would arrive for training and, in the space of a few minutes, people would say 'good morning' twice." **Fabio da Silva revealed that Sir Alex Ferguson got him confused with twin brother Rafael, and ended up giving the wrong Brazilian his famous hairdryer treatment.**

"I want to play for England. I want to open, or play top order, for England, across all formats. I want to go as high as I can."

Alice Capsey, aged 16, has more than just impending GCSE results in her sights after starring in the Hundred. Head coach Jonathan Batty had to ring her mum to get permission for the teenager to play.

"I've never tried so hard in my life to finish third. It's not a position I've found myself in very often, but I gave it my all out there, but I'm looking forward to having a crack at it again." **Rory McIlroy admits his perception of participating in the Olympic Games has changed after missing out on a medal in the men's golf tournament in Tokyo.**



"If you don't like The Hundred, you are wrong!!! **The Manchester Originals' Alex Hartley has zero time for the doubters.**

"It's strange that someone so successful reacts this way from time to time, but in the end he's very competitive and reacts like that. It is important to avoid this, especially as a role model for many children. He is the No. 1 in the world and one of best in history." **Rafael Nadal admits he found Novak Djokovic's outburst in the Olympics 'strange' after the Serb took out his anger on his racquet.**

"Do you want to join a club that was formed ten years ago? City are a small club, mate. They'll ruin you!" **Aston Villa supporters took matters into their own hands to convince Jack Grealish to stay whilst at their pre-season training camp.**

"It's been great fun so far. To be honest I think it's worked even better than I anticipated. I think everyone was wondering whether it would be easy to get the flow with ten balls from each end and whether the game would flow in the same manner." **Former England bowler Steven Finn on the first ever men's Hundred match.**

"There are other sports which are the traditional Olympic sports we are used to watching and we are not under the spotlight. But I feel there is an immense sense of responsibility." **Golf's Paul Casey on the pressure to win an Olympic medal.**

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