

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

December/January 2022

Issue 100 | £5.95



100th
issue

TRAINING
SPECIAL FEATURE
GROUNDS

THE LORD'S WAY

BEING DONE

For Pitchcare's ton-up issue, Neville Johnson visited a place where centuries are given special recognition. A chat with Head Groundsman Karl McDermott at the home of cricket in London's St John's Wood reveals why, for him, there is simply nowhere else to go as a cricket groundsman



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WELCOME TO

PITCHCARE

Notching up a ton

Many of you may be aware that this issue is our 100th! It is a fantastic achievement and provides an opportunity to reflect on the hundreds of great features with turfcare professionals we have interviewed along the way.

My journey started back in 2013, when I joined the Pitchcare team to help Peter Britton – who launched the magazine single-handedly in June 2005. We were on the 50th issue then, so to now be another fifty down the line is quite scary... how time flies when you're having fun! And, I am being honest when I say that this magazine is such a pleasure to work on. It's a reflection of the industry that we get to speak with so many lovely, interesting and knowledgeable characters to tell their stories and pass on their experiences and wisdom to all our readers, so a big thank you goes to each and every one of you who has taken the time to chat with us over the years.

We share our centenary anniversary with a name you can all trust – Dennis Mowers - and so we pass on many congratulations and best wishes to them for 100 years of manufacturing excellence. You may have seen through social media over the past couple of weeks, that we have a huge prize draw to win a Dennis machine from a selected range, including: a G860 complete with 8 blade cassettes, Verticut TT, S500 PLUS, FT complete with 10 blade cassettes, G26D/G30D/G34D, PRO 34R, Razor Ultra/Razor or a Simplex. Also up for grabs are nine Pitchcare shop vouchers (up to the value of £250). All the details are on the advert opposite or look out for further info on social

media, but make sure you enter to be in with a chance to win one of these great machines for your club (terms and conditions apply).

Dennis have advertised with us from the very first issue and, obviously, we could not produce this magazine without the loyal support and commitment from all of our advertisers. Therefore, we would like to extend a huge thank you to all our supporters over the years, however big or small!

Last, but by no means least, it would not be possible to share so many articles from all around the country without our network of freelance writers. Peter and I would like to express a huge thank you to you all for your continued commitment and hard work... here's to the next fifty!

Wishing you all a happy new year and we look forward to seeing you at BTME for the exciting Dennis prize draw.

Kerry Haywood
Editor



SAY THAT AGAIN!

"The greenkeeping sector needs to start considering how to attract more young people before it's too late. When I'm thinking that I'm the last generation of greenkeepers, that's scary. I cannot see an answer to the problem"

Paul Barrow, Flixton Golf Club

"You can't let them jump on the roller or mow the square straight away, but you can find a pathway to let them gain experience and hopefully a passion"

Karl McDermott, MCC

"I strongly believe that part of the issue with attracting new people into the industry is that there is no standardisation for salaries etc. It shouldn't matter whether you are joining Accrington Stanley or a Premier League club"

John Ledwidge, Leicester City FC

"Barriers to entering the sector present themselves at school level as the curriculum fails to promote greenkeeping and horticulture as career options"

Phil Lomas, Oldham College

"The most important part of all this is that there is more to life than worrying about grass, and people's mental health and well-being is paramount"

Lee Metcalfe, City Football Academy

"Our task, as custodians of the land, is to get the wider community to take ownership of the land and become invested in what we do here"

Greg Wellings, St Annes Old Links

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DAVE MEARS

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Issue 100 - December/January 2022

Karl McDermott, Marylebone Cricket Club

COVER STORY: The Lord's way being done

For Pitchcare's ton-up issue, Neville Johnson visited a place where centuries are given special recognition. A chat with Head Groundsman Karl McDermott at the home of cricket in London's St John's Wood reveals why, for him, there is simply nowhere else to go as a cricket groundsman. **P54**

GOLF

Eager to please

There are not too many golfing establishments that can say they are part of a country estate dating back to 1674, but Blackwood Golf Centre in Northern Ireland is certainly one of them. Chris McCullough visited head greenkeeper Jonny Eager to discover how he manages looking after not one, but two, 18-hole golf courses. **P16**

Let the long journey begin

Sene Valley Golf Club in Hythe, Kent have embarked on a long journey to improve the course's infrastructure that involves all aspects; cost-effective greenkeeping, long term development, agronomic stability, replacing an ageing machinery fleet and improving the course. **P24**

Norton firing on all cylinders

On a rather windy autumn day, David Mears visited and chatted to David Norton, the new Course Manager at Hull Golf Club, just a year into his appointment. They spent time discussing his plans for the course and what had been tackled already. **P30**

Doubling up!

Greg Rhodes rambles through the rough on one of England's golf coast Top 100 links treasures to meet Course Manager Greg Wellings and his team, who are already preparing for another hectic Open qualifying events season. **P46**

TRAINING GROUNDS

The industry has to change

When Leicester City Football Club launched its Sports Turf Academy (STA) in July 2021, the aim was clear; to be world leaders in the training and education of the current and next generation of sports turf groundstaff, whilst applying that learning to active working environments. Kerry Haywood visited Head of Sports Turf and Grounds John Ledwidge to find out more and take a look around the world-class training centre. **P62**

Spinning plates!

Working at Fulham FC's Motspur Park training ground is like spinning plates reckons Head Groundsman Declan Robinson. It's an analogy he is happy with though, having learned from some of the top groundsman in the industry. Blair Ferguson chatted with him about his career path and ambitions. **P72**

Unsung heroes

Head Groundsperson Lee Metcalfe has looked after the City Football Academy (CFA) for ten years now. Lee is a household name in our industry, but when Editor Kerry Haywood caught up with him to discuss the many challenges over the past couple of years and an increased demand for grass pitches, it's clear that the struggles are real... regardless of how high profile you may be! **P80**



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WINTER SPORTS

FIFA Update: Spreading the Word

Less than a year from now, the culmination of years' worth of work will be played out in front of a global audience during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The build-up to the tournament has been far from conventional, starting with the climatic conditions the games are played in through to the Covid-19 pandemic that has shifted a lot of the later work online. **P88**

The Generals

Nicknamed 'the Generals', Chesham United Football Club is a semi-professional football club in Buckinghamshire who play in the Southern League Premier Division South. The part-time groundsman is Craig Ringsell and we recently met him to discuss how he juggles his time between the club and his successful contracting business. **P96**

SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Conservation to new heights

On World Environment Day, 5 June 2019, the University of East Anglia (UEA) joined forces with other organisations worldwide to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. Based in Norwich, Norfolk, UEA has led the way in climate change through the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (CRU), the Climate Research Unit and researchers in other UEA schools. **P102**

Marks of distinction

Training excellence is the calling card for a North West college breaking new ground in developing the next generation of greenkeepers and parks professionals, as Greg Rhodes discovers when visiting Oldham College. **P110**

TECHNICAL

Fact or fiction?

In this article, Dave French, sales manager at Reesink e-Vehicles, explains the issue, dispels the myths when it comes to electric vehicles and provides all the reassurance you need to be ready for the inevitable transition to cleaner, greener machinery options. **P120**

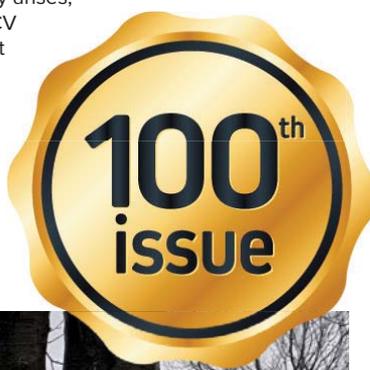
Nimble numbers on the turf

There's a plethora of ride-on mowers on the market which can make purchasing a complex process. In this article, we talk to Phil Catley, Key Account and Product Manager at Kubota to get some pointers on choosing the right ride-on when space is tight, and look at some examples of how the company's machines are solving grounds management challenges. **P124**

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Will You Beat the Sifter?

Can your CV carry you through to an interview for a great job? Maybe you are looking right now for your first full time job, or maybe you are hoping for a new job elsewhere? Whether you are looking or not - it might be wise to locate your current CV to see if it needs updating - just in case a good opportunity arises, and your CV has to beat the sifter! **P128**



John Ledwidge, Leicester City FC



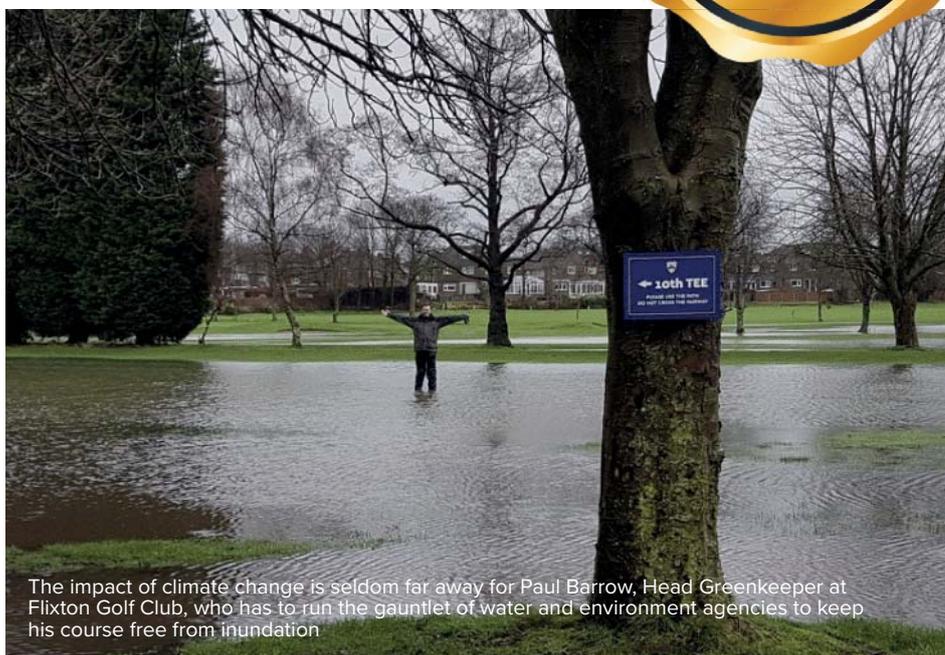
Lee Metcalfe, City Football Academy



David Norton, Hull Golf Club



Tom Everett, University of East Anglia



The impact of climate change is seldom far away for Paul Barrow, Head Greenkeeper at Flixton Golf Club, who has to run the gauntlet of water and environment agencies to keep his course free from inundation

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World first for Qatar stadium

First fully demountable stadium in FIFA World Cup history

With the one-year countdown for Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup having started on Sunday 21st November 21, the Middle East country unveiled its seventh tournament-ready venue - Stadium 974.

The venue - formerly known as Ras Abu Aboud - is made primarily from shipping containers and is located close to the Doha Port, directly opposite the spectacular West Bay skyline.

The innovative design means this is the first fully demountable stadium in FIFA World Cup history.

Constructed using shipping containers, removable seats and other modular building blocks, not only will this innovative, 40,000-seat venue have a remarkable design, but it will be entirely dismantled and repurposed after the World Cup. Its parts will be used in other sporting or non-sporting projects, setting a new standard in sustainability and introducing bold new ideas in tournament legacy planning.



974 shipping containers were used in the construction of Stadium 974 in Qatar

Stadium 974 hosted its first match on 30th November when the United Arab Emirates and Syria went head-to-head on the opening day of the FIFA Arab Cup. Stadium 974 is the seventh tournament venue to be completed by the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) and follows Khalifa International, Al Janoub, Education City, Ahmad Bin Ali, Al Bayt and Al Thumama in being declared ready to host matches during the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup, which will kick off in from year's time.

The stadium's new name reflects the number of shipping containers used in the development and is also Qatar's international subscriber dialling code. The name also reflects the stadium's location as the gateway to Qatar, being close to Hamad International Airport, Doha Airport and Hamad Port.

Due to its innovative design, the Stadium 974 bowl avoids the need for air conditioning as it

is naturally ventilated. Much of the stadium's structure is made from recycled steel, while water efficiency methods ensure it will reduce water use by 40 percent compared to a conventional stadium development. HBK Contracting acted as the main contractor, while TiME Qatar was the project manager.

Legacy factor SC Secretary General Hassan Al Thawadi spoke about the stadium's salient features, "We are very proud to announce the completion of Stadium 974. This is yet another milestone on the road to 2022 as we edge closer to hosting the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world." Al Thawadi added, "We consider this innovative venue a game-changer for future mega-event hosts. It's another example of the powerful legacy our World Cup will leave."

Football Foundation to 'Power Up Grass Pitches'

The Football Foundation, the country's biggest sports charity is on a mission to improve over 7,000 grass pitches by 2024 and 20,000 by 2030, to ensure the 12 million grassroots football players across the country have great places to play.

To help make this ambition a reality, the Football Foundation has developed an app which is now being rolled out across the country. 'PitchPower' is an online tool that gives every community football club and organisation in the country the ability to carry out their own grass pitch inspections, providing fast and accurate data which is less time-intensive and more efficient than in-person inspections. Once an inspection is submitted, Regional Pitch Advisers at the Grounds Management Association produce an assessment report with bespoke advice and recommendations to improve the grass pitch quality at a site.

By using this tool more widely, the Football Foundation anticipates it will be able to carry out as many as 20,000 inspections a year, five times as many as in the past. In its trial phase, PitchPower has helped to inspect almost 5,000 pitches. These inspections have led to 446 grants being issued worth £8.6m, all of which has gone towards improving 1,564 pitches.

Once inspections have been completed via the PitchPower app - clubs and facilities are then eligible to apply for funding from the Football Foundation to support pitch improvements identified through the app.

Welcome investment into grassroots football announced

The Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation welcomes the news that a further £205 million of government funding will be made available to invest in community sports facilities across England in the next three years.

The investment, which was announced by the Chancellor during his Comprehensive Spending Review, will be used by the Football Foundation to target communities up and down the country who will benefit from access to better sports facilities. These regions reflect the priority areas set out by the Government in its 'Levelling Up Agenda' - 70 percent of Football Foundation funding will be going to category 1 and 2 areas identified by the Government across England.

This new funding will provide welcome support to the grassroots football community as the nation begins to build back from Covid-19.

Many of these improved grassroots facilities, whilst rooted in football, will host a range of other community sports, including rugby and cricket.

Robert Sullivan, Football Foundation Chief Executive Officer, said: "This investment is welcome news for all those involved in



grassroots football across the country. We know that playing on good quality facilities helps people get fitter, improves mental wellbeing, grows confidence and builds stronger relationships. This is all essential for individuals and communities as we emerge out of the Covid-19 crisis."

"With the government, Premier League and The FA's investment, we have made plenty of progress in the last two decades, but there is still lots of work to do to ensure all communities across England get the standard of local sports facilities they need and deserve. This new funding will unlock the power of even more pitches to help transform people's lives."

Mark Bullingham, Chief Executive of The FA said: "This investment into grassroots football pitches and multi-sport facilities is fantastic news for communities throughout the country. It will help the nation get active as we emerge from the impact of Covid. This is an important part of the Government's £550m commitment to transform grassroots football."

SAGE partners with Bio-Circle

Organisers confirm it will host a special Environmental/Sustainability Solutions Expo for groundcare

Organisers of the Sports and Ground Expo (SAGE) are delighted to announce it has partnered with environmental surface technology specialists, Bio-Circle, and will run a Sustainable Solutions for Groundcare summit at next year's SAGE 2022 event.

Bio-Circle offer environmental solutions for the cleaning and maintenance of groundcare equipment, in a sustainable manner, and with a much lower environmental impact compared to traditional cleaning methods. The company uses VOC-free chemicals that are designed to reduce costs for organisations and lower the environmental impact in comparison to high pressure water systems. Bio-Circle's green credentials are supported via the new Green Code Sustainability Membership and ISO 14001.

SAGE 2022 is set to be the 'biggest outdoor trade show for the sports and grounds maintenance industry' and will take place at Three Counties Showground in Malvern on 6th and 7th July 2022.

For the first time, it will hold a 'Sustainable Solutions for Grounds Specialists Summit', which will hold a live panel event, with experts across

the industry. More information to be released soon.

This is especially relevant to the sports and groundcare sector, as the English Football League (EFL) announced earlier this month a new league-wide scheme, that will help support all 72 clubs across the country to improve their environmental practices and operations. It will also provide a way for their groundstaff to undertake the training to achieve accreditation by a new Green Code Scheme.

SAGE 2022 event manager Vicky Panniers said: "The deadline for becoming sustainable in the world of sports is now looming and our industry must now start to think of the steps they need to take to become carbon neutral and comply with the new legislation."

"SAGE is, therefore, delighted to be partnering with Bio-Circle, who are leading the way in demonstrating how businesses can lower their impact on the environment and take vital steps towards being sustainable."



"We're now actively supporting our partners within the sports and grounds maintenance world by delivering a resourceful environment where visitors can find out all they need to know directly from the experts at SAGE 2022."

More information will be released soon.

The SAGE 2022 EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT offers 10% off any stand until 31/01/22 but space is going fast.

For more information, contact the team by email: team@sportsandgrounds.co.uk, by phone: +44 (0)1684 580101 or go to www.sportsandgrounds.co.uk.

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Off to San Diego

BIGGA and Bernhard & Company delegates revealed

The British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) and its Partner Bernhard & Company have revealed the 10 sports turf managers who will be heading to San Diego, California in February 2022 for the GCSAA Conference & Show.

The delegates will represent the UK greenkeeping industry as they network with peers from around the globe and sample the education on offer at the world's largest golf course management event.

Each of the delegates was chosen after demonstrating their commitment to professional development and a passion for the greenkeeping industry. This year's delegation will mark the 200th BIGGA member participating in this incredible initiative, which was first introduced in 2001. As such, BIGGA is tremendously grateful for the ongoing support of Bernhard & Company, which hosts this invaluable opportunity for 10 members of the association each year.

The members selected for the 2022 BIGGA Delegation to the GCSAA Conference & Show are:

Joe Curtis, head greenkeeper at Diamond Club Ottenstein, Austria



San Diego Convention Center

Matthew Dobbs, course manager at Ringway Golf Club, Cheshire

Allan Duncan, head greenkeeper at Broomieknowe Golf Club, Edinburgh

Craig Haldane, golf course manager at The Gleneagles Hotel & Golf Courses, Perthshire

Colin Hopper, head greenkeeper at Elsham Golf Club, Lincolnshire

Matthew Houseman, head greenkeeper at Scarcroft Golf Club, West Yorkshire

Chris Low, head greenkeeper at Walsall Golf Club, West Midlands

Darren McLaughlan, course manager at North Berwick Golf Club, East Lothian

Scott McTaggart, course manager at Sandyhills Golf Club, Glasgow

Andrew Wilson, deputy course manager at Whitecraigs Golf Club, Glasgow

The BIGGA delegation to the GCSAA Conference & Show is considered one of the leading opportunities available to greenkeepers and the experience can be truly career-defining.



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Continue your professional journey this January

BIGGA's Continue to Learn is the world-leading education programme for sports turf professionals and returns to the Harrogate Convention Centre this January as part of BTME 2022. Head to btme.org.uk to find out more



2022

A first for Carnoustie

Another First for Carnoustie as they are named winner of The Climate Action Award at the 2021 IAGTO Sustainability Awards

As part of their ongoing commitment to sustainability, IAGTO and the GEO Foundation introduced this new award to recognise a facility that has made a strategic commitment to taking climate action, with practical steps to reduce emissions and manage their landscape to maximise carbon sequestration.

Michael Wells, Chief Executive of Carnoustie Golf Links said: "Being awarded this Climate Action Award means a great deal to us. As an organisation, we are, and have for some time, been very conscious of our environmental impact on the planet. Being sustainable is one of our core values and we encourage every one of our team to make decisions with that value in mind. We have invested in more sustainable practices both on and off the course, and we are on a continued journey of improvement. Our Links Superintendent, Craig Boath, is an inaugural GEO Sustainable Golf Champion for his leadership in this area and he has been instrumental in helping us on this journey."

As a company, we are known for leading the



Craig Boath, Links Superintendent

way within the sport and our sustainable practices are another example of how we intend to influence and drive change. To be the first organisation to win this award is real honour and privilege."

Craig Boath, Links Superintendent of Carnoustie Golf Links said: "We are delighted that IAGTO and the GEO Foundation are supporting such an important cause and highlighting the excellent work that's being carried out in the industry. We are pleased that our efforts have been recognised by way of this award. We have such diverse eco-system of

plants and wildlife here at Carnoustie and we will continue to protect it, and if possible enhance it, whilst still providing the exceptional test of golf that everyone expects from Carnoustie."

The Open Championship venue have made sustainability an integral part of their vision and have been GEO Certified on three occasions - in 2013, 2016 and 2019 (and are preparing for a fourth). They were also named 'Environmental Golf Course of the Year' at the STRI Environmental Awards in 2018.

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PELLENC

Park Avenue Plan

Bradford Park Avenue pitch plan to get back on cricket map

Nasa Hussain, head groundsman at Bradford Park Avenue, believes that hybrid pitches could help to put the famous venue back on the map.

The initial plan was that Avenue would stage Yorkshire matches while Headingley was being used for the 2019 World Cup, but a delay in funding and then Covid-19 have set the £5.5m five-stage project back.

However, it is believed that better times lie ahead for an atmospheric venue that was popular with Yorkshire players and opponents alike when it staged county matches.

Since the project started six years ago to get first-class cricket back to Avenue, assurances have been made that the community would be at the heart of the project, rather than them being ditched partway through.

By keeping the community at the centre of things, it will hopefully inspire girls and boys and men and women who use the facilities on a daily basis that they are at a facility that is of first-class status.

Unfortunately, the cancellation of the fifth Test against India in September had a serious impact on the ECB's ability to fund things.



So it is clear that, as far as Avenue is concerned, patience is a virtue.

Phase one of the plan has been achieved - building a changing pavilion and creating an eight-lane outdoor non-turf practice facility that is widely used by the community.

The next phase is probably to have a MUGA (multi-use games area) adjacent to the existing nets, which have worked so well, and then more people, more girls and boys from the community, can be invited to participate in softball cricket.

It is intended to have a roof over the top, but be open at the sides so that even in inclement weather boys and girls can play cricket there throughout the year.

At the moment, Park Avenue can only be used for seven months of the year.

There is no time limit on when the other phases are completed, as it depends on when the money becomes available, but the ECB and Bradford Council have been willing partners and share the ultimate vision for the ground.

Avenue would ultimately have a capacity of 4,000-5,000, which would be suitable for a Yorkshire men's limited-overs match or a women's international.

But there is plenty to do before either of those things come to fruition, such as building a new pavilion and installing seating around the ground, neither of which come cheap.

Saltex - back in style

After a year's absence, SALTEX roars back into life and celebrates 75th anniversary

Put back a year due to the pandemic, the buzz was certainly back on the show floor as SALTEX 2021 reunited the industry and brought together almost 7,500 attendees across two days.

The annual exhibition, organised by the Grounds Management Association (GMA), offered visitors a fantastic opportunity to witness the largest product and service showcase in grounds management, including many new innovations being unveiled for the first ever time at this year's show.

Learning LIVE, SALTEX's all-encompassing education programme featured over thirty sessions and a number of high-profile speakers who tackled a number of key issues such as the future workforce, climate change and mental health.

Other show features on the GMA Hub, including Pathology and Soil Science Live, Ask The Expert and the Job Clinic, offered invaluable free advice and career progression opportunities.



The overwhelming consensus was that SALTEX 2021 successfully reunited every corner of the groundcare industry and demonstrated to newcomers just how great the sector is.

"I have been coming to SALTEX for many, many years and I never get bored of it - it is a great opportunity to see what is out there in the industry," said Ted Mitchell, national facilities development manager at the Rugby Football Union (RFU). "This year has been great, and particularly because we have gone through a restructure at the RFU, and we have new members of the team. SALTEX has really opened their eyes to the sector and the wider industry."

Geoff Webb, GMA CEO, reflected on what may well have been the most meaningful SALTEX yet. "On behalf of all of us at the GMA, we really want to extend our thanks to all our exhibitors and visitors that have showed their support for SALTEX this year. It has been a turbulent period for us all and we are delighted that we got the opportunity to celebrate the 75th edition with so many of you."

"I believe SALTEX 2021 has brought hope for the future and has showcased what our industry is capable of overcoming."

For more information visit www.gmasaltex.co.uk

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Plant a Tree for the Jubilee

Agrovista Amenity becomes a Jubilee Partner

Agrovista Amenity is proud to announce that it has joined The Tree Council as a Jubilee Partner.

Since 1973, The Tree Council has been working towards bringing everyone together with a shared mission to care for trees and our planet's future. It is therefore fitting that The Tree Council is an official delivery partner of The Queen's Green Canopy.

The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which invites people from across the United Kingdom to "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee".

Everyone from individuals to Scout and Girlguiding groups, villages, cities, counties, schools and corporates will be encouraged to play their part to enhance the environment by planting trees during the winter tree planting season.

By becoming one of the Jubilee Partners, Agrovista Amenity will be playing an integral role in planting trees and hedgerows in honour of Her Majesty's service to the nation, creating a lasting legacy which will benefit future generations for years to come.



The aim is to achieve 70 Jubilee Partners, whose collective impact will ensure the planting of an incredible 35,000 trees and 7 kilometres of hedgerows.

Ed Smith, Landscape Team Manager for Agrovista Amenity, revealed his delight at becoming a Jubilee Partner. "It is such a wonderful initiative," said Ed. "We see tree planting as a real benefit to the environment and with everything that is going on in terms of COP26, we have a real opportunity to make a change. The direction we are heading in terms of our bio-degradable tree guards, best practice and our commitment to sustainability reflects this."

"Our planet is changing. We are on a journey and want to play our part. Supporting the likes of The Tree Council is very much part of that journey."

"This initiative will signal a huge amount of environmental, biodiversity and other ecosystem services benefits."

The Agrovista Amenity team celebrated becoming a Jubilee Partner by attending a corporate planting day which took place in Bicester in Oxfordshire in early December.

For more information about Agrovista UK, visit www.agrovista.co.uk/amenity

'We're fighting every year'

Garmouth and Kingston in plea for council flood intervention

Garmouth and Kingston Golf Club, situated on the bank of the River Spey, has continuously contended with flooding and even lost two holes after the river washed them away.

Ken Mcginley has struggled to combat the floods since taking over as Club Captain earlier this year. The club has bounced back after being "on its knees" two years ago but continuous flooding is threatening to undermine this period of regeneration.

"We're fighting every year," he said.

"We're fed up. The course is flooded first and then the village is hit. We were planning on buying a new clubhouse but that money has gone towards flood defences now."

"It's frustrating. Flooding means no buses or anything coming through lower Garmouth. Emergency services wouldn't get through. It just shuts everything down."

He has warned that the village sewage works that are situated on the golf course are also at severe risk if action isn't taken soon.



From left John Milne Head Greenkeeper at Garmouth Golf Club, Councillor Marc Macrae and Club Captain Ken Mcginley

He said: "The sewage works are right next to the village. If that goes, the contamination caused would be disastrous. The river would be totally contaminated as well."

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

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'Mr SALTEX' inducted into GMA Hall of Fame



The Grounds Management Association (GMA) has announced that SALTEX Operations Director, Derek Walder, also known as 'Mr SALTEX' will be the third inductee into its industry Hall of Fame.

This latest honour, the most significant gesture of appreciation the GMA can award, follows Derek's Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 and is being awarded to Derek as an acknowledgement of an illustrious career in the industry spanning more than half a century.

Derek has overseen many important moments in the show's history, like when it moved from outdoor venues to an indoor one and, most recently, the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuring the safety of visitors at this autumn's show. SALTEX 2021, marked his 40th delivery of the annual trade exhibition.

His induction into the GMA's Hall of Fame means that Derek is just the third inductee, joining legendary grounds managers, the late Eddie Seaward MBE, former Head Groundsman at the All-England Lawn Tennis Club and Steve Braddock, Head of Grounds Management at the Arsenal Football Club training centre. His award represents the many crucial roles being played behind the scenes that keep the sector, and its events, running.

Apprentice success

John Deere training helps 38 young apprentices graduate



The latest group of talented young service technicians and parts personnel have successfully graduated from John Deere's pioneering Ag Tech, Turf Tech and Parts Tech advanced apprenticeship programmes.

The 38-strong cohort passed the national scheme - provided by training provider ProVQ - and their achievements have been recognised at a special event held for them at the Crowne Plaza in Nottingham.

John Deere dealer Ben Burgess saw success for two of its staff with James Skipper from Beeston in Norfolk winning the Ag/Turf Tech Apprentice of the Year for 2021, whilst Madeleine Green from the company's Oakham site in Rutland won the Parts Tech award.

Both were presented with new Apple iPads as their prize by John Deere Apprentice Centre Manager James Haslam.

Farol saw its Ag/Turf Tech apprentices Ciahran Quick from the company's Shefford Woodlands dealership in Berkshire, and Henry Atkins from

Midhurst in West Sussex, pick up the runner up prizes of a certificate and high street vouchers worth £250.

John Deere Branch Training Manager Allan Cochran said: "Our apprenticeship programme has been running for nearly three decades and was created because we saw the trend of fewer people coming into the industry. We needed to take steps to ensure that there was new talent to fill our business and dealer network."

"That work is as relevant today as it was then. To see these fantastic individuals graduating from their courses and taking the next big step in their careers is incredibly rewarding."

"Helping to give these young people their first step on the career ladder builds a strong foundation for their future success, and John Deere places great importance on supporting them to reach their full potential."

"We aim to nurture and mould these enthusiastic apprentices who have the skills and desire to work in our business and across the industry."

Obituary: Alan Sturgess

Alan Sturgess, a passionate cricketer who was a member of Fawley Cricket Club for over 60 years, taking on roles including president, treasurer and award-winning groundsman, has died aged 75. He passed away at home surrounded by his family.

The club said in a statement it was "deeply saddened", adding: "We have lost our leader, mentor and a friend. Alan simply was Mr Fawley CC. As a player, Alan was a competitive and talented all-rounder."

"Off the field Alan held most positions within the club. He was our club treasurer for over 20 years and, since retiring, our head groundsman. He has for many years been the club president."

"The club will never be the same again, that is for sure."

Leaving school at 14, he started an apprenticeship, learning all aspects of

construction. He was offered a job with Exxon at Fawley oil refinery where he stayed for over 35 years, ending his career within the procurement department.

As well as playing cricket, Alan was also keen on watching and attended two Ashes series in Australia and Test matches all across the UK. He was also part of the Hampshire Cricket League's disciplinary committee for a number of years and, until very recently, was secretary of the New Forest Club Cricket Association.

In 2004, Alan took voluntary redundancy and was offered a retraining package by Exxon to help staff move into alternative employment. Even though he was retiring, he asked bosses to pay for him to attend a wood-turning course.

With more time on his hands due to retirement, he became head groundsman at Fawley CC.



The wicket was so well looked after by Alan and the team that, in 2014, they were handed the Southern Premiere League award for best ground.

He was a proud grandfather of four and enjoyed helping out on the school runs as well as taking the children fishing.

His funeral was at Test Valley Crematorium.

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Racking up a ton

Peter Britton talks us through 100 issues of the Pitchcare magazine



Back in May 2005, before either Facebook or Twitter had launched to an unsuspecting public, the Pitchcare website was one of the few places that turfcare professionals could communicate with each other via our message board.

As is his way, Dave Saltman wanted more to be able spread the 'Pitchcare' word and ideology.

The website had been up and running for just over three years and growth had been 'steady', thanks in the main to Dave's dogged determination and John Richards steady hand on the rudder.

So, when I found myself 'in between' jobs following my departure from Turf Professional magazine, a phone call from Dave (whom I had previously met at various industry demo days and exhibitions) interrupted my golf asking what I could bring to the Pitchcare table? To cut a long story short, I suggested that he needed a hard copy magazine and I was his man!

Dave liked the idea, on the proviso that it paid for itself. John was not so sure but was convinced into 'giving it a go'.

So, on the 24th May 2005, coincidentally the day my first grandchild was born in the wee small hours, I found myself driving up to Wolverhampton from Salisbury Hospital maternity unit - in a pink shirt in honour of my granddaughter - to meet the Pitchcare team.

The small office in the Wolverhampton Science Park was where I first met John Richards, web

monkey Alastair Battrick, Dan Hughes and the 'enthusiastic' Laurence (Loz) Gale. Apart from a part-time accounts lady, that was the team.

It was agreed that we should aim to get the first issue out by the end of June so that a second issue could be produced ahead of the Saltex exhibition at Windsor, thereby helping to grow the magazine readership.

So that left me around three weeks to source a printer, sell advertising and get it posted out for the end of June. Fortunately, Loz already had enough articles from previous website features to fill the magazine, but he was tasked with speaking to the groundsmen at the Ashes Test venues to find out how preparations were going. Subsequently, Lord's groundsman Mick Hunt would feature on the first cover, along with Essex CCC's Head Groundsman Stuart Kerrison and Chartered Biologist Doctor Kate Entwistle.

Securing advertising was 'interesting!' One potential advertiser greeted my call with; "why does this industry need another f**king magazine?" and a few others were dubious about its launch.

Nevertheless, I managed to secure enough revenue to be able to print and post - and pay my wages - and the first issue, containing 48 pages, 'doormatted' at the end of June after a somewhat frantic three weeks.

Advertisers in that first issue included, John Deere, Ransomes, Toro, Dennis Mowers, Lloyds of Letchworth, Hunter Grinders, Ecosolve, Allett Mowers, BLEC, STM, SCH and Imants, plus a few that are no longer trading. We had a full classified section too, which I was encouraged by as they had committed for a year!

It is pleasing to note that most of those original advertisers continue to support us and, for that, I am very grateful.

So our stall was set out. One thing that always bugged me with other industry magazines (including Turf Professional that I had worked on) was that they filled their pages with press releases, scattered with the occasional feature article. In short, every magazine's content was pretty much the same. So we made the decision not to carry PR in the magazine, but to feature people profiles - the groundsmen and greenkeepers working at the coalface - technical articles, training and education and relevant industry news - and that the design would be more FHM than Country Life!



That formula proved to be a success, perhaps with a few clients chuntering along the way, and issue 2 rose to 60 pages with more advertisers coming on board. Loz was now working his socks off sourcing new feature content, which proved successful, and even the chunterers saw the merits of the magazine.

Over the past sixteen and a half years the content of the magazine, and indeed the website, has remained true to its initial ethos and the magazine now averages 132 pages per issue.

At the fifty issue mark, Kerry Haywood, herself an experienced writer and designer within the industry, joined us as editor, with Loz eventually moving to pastures new in 2015.

We've raised concerns over a number of important issues including rubber crumb infills, the use of agricultural chemicals, conservation and ecology, pay scales, mental health and much more, all the while championing the use of natural turf over artificial. And we will continue to do so.

A big thank you goes to all our advertisers who make the whole thing possible, and to the countless greenkeepers, groundsmen and technical experts who have helped us to provide such a vibrant and meaningful magazine.

So, here we are at our 100th issue. As Kerry has said in her foreword, it's been fun to be able to provide this magazine for the industry and, whilst I can't see me personally celebrating our 200th issue, I know that the magazine, now under the ownership of Agrovista Amenity, is in safe hands.



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Blackwood Golf Club

Eager to please

There are not too many golfing establishments that can say they are part of a country estate dating back to 1674 but Blackwood Golf Centre in Northern Ireland is certainly one of them. Chris McCullough visited head greenkeeper **Jonny Eager** to discover how he manages looking after not one, but two, 18-hole golf courses.



Tucked away gently into the rolling countryside just over ten miles south of Belfast sits the expansive and historic Clondeboye Estate, first settled way back in 1674.

Through time the estate, under the ownership of the Dufferin family, developed into quite a conservation zone incorporating the largest area of broadleaved woodland in Northern Ireland.

As well as that, the estate today boasts a large dairy farm producing its own brand of yoghurts, a picturesque courtyard wedding venue and is home to two 18-hole golf courses.

These two courses, namely the par 54 Temple course and the par 71 championship Hamilton course, stretch out to cover 240 acres and service the needs of the Blackwood Golf Club, albeit under separate identities.

Set in beautiful woodland lined with gorse and water features, the Hamilton course provides spectacular views of the Clondeboye Estate and

Helen's Tower. Each hole is unique, demanding different shapes of shot with water features coming into play on eleven of the eighteen holes. USGA greens provide challenging slopes and undulations while making the greens a pleasure to putt on.

The signature hole, the 166 yard Par 3 12th, is a picturesque yet demanding hole over water, providing a stiff examination of the tee shot. There is a diverse range of wildlife all over the course including a family of swans breeding for the last few years.

Moving over to the Temple course, it is an 18 hole Par 3 course which acts as a mini version of the full course, the Hamilton, including bunkers and water hazards.

Set in woodland, lined with gorse and lakes, it provides good opportunities for the more experienced player to hone their short game whilst remaining a challenge for beginners. It is also a comfortable walk for the more mature golfer.

The Blackwood Golf Centre provides golfers of all ages and



We also use outside agronomists, STRI Group, and would use external contractors for any major work on the grounds such as a new project that required any substantial earth moving

abilities with various facilities to improve their skills, including a floodlit and covered twenty-six bay driving range.

Outdoor practice areas include a short game facility and putting green with a testing sloping surface to best replicate the USGA greens found on the course.

The man tasked with the enviable job of looking after the courses is Jonny Eager who has pretty much followed in the footsteps of his father and other family members into the world of greenkeeping.

Jonny has been working at the Blackwood Golf Centre for the past twenty-eight years, and had previously worked at both Clondeboye Golf Club and Knock Golf Club.

Jonny said: "I've been working here at the Blackwood Golf Centre since just after it was first constructed in 1993. It was my late father Hugh who led me into greenkeeping as he was the head greenkeeper at the Clondeboye Golf Club and Fort William Golf



Club in Belfast."

"I worked alongside him and later qualified with my NVQ level three in sports turf management. Now, I have over forty years' experience in the industry."

"My brother Jim was also a head greenkeeper at the Royal Belfast Golf Club and is now working on a part-time basis. My other brother David was the head greenkeeper at Belvoir Park Golf Club. Greenkeeping really has run in the family," said Jonny.

Jonny looks after the two courses at the Blackwood Golf Centre ably assisted by his team of seven full-time and three part-time staff. As Blackwood Golf Centre is a proprietary owned business, Jonny is in direct contact with the owner to decide on budgets and to discuss any new projects on the horizon.

"The Hamilton course is the bigger of the two courses taking up around two thirds of the total area we have here," said Jonny. "I

have an excellent team behind me, four of which are also long-term employees here. My second in command, Andy McDowell, has also been working here since the centre was opened."

"We carry out the majority of the work on the equipment here ourselves as one of the guys, Gordon Leckey, is employed as our dedicated mechanic. The only time we need to outsource any work regarding the machinery is if something major was wrong with the equipment, such as a hydraulic system failing, for example."

"We also use outside agronomists, STRI Group, and would use external contractors for any major work on the grounds such as a new project that required any substantial earth moving," said Jonny.

Across the courses, the soil profile at the Blackwood Golf Centre is classed as heavy clay. The greens are of USGA construction, and the tees were made with a layer of soil topped off with a layer of sand.



The irrigation systems were needed in the drought conditions experienced over the past two years. The only other weather problems we have is that the courses take some time to thaw out if hit by snow and frost





Computer sensors track the golf ball when the golfer hits it on the driving range and shows the exact path it took to the destination. This then acts as a teaching aid to help the golfers

Overall, both courses at Blackwood are very well drained and the centre has its own built-in irrigation systems on the greens and tees which have proved very useful over the past few years.

"The irrigation systems were needed in the drought conditions experienced over the past two years," said Jonny. "The only other weather problems we have is that the courses would take some time to thaw out if

hit by snow and frost."

"There are a lot of trees standing along the south and east sides of the courses giving us a lot of shade. If there was frost on the courses then we would use temporary greens."

"Club members also have access to the twenty-six indoor covered bays on the range and six outdoor. There is also a chipping area with a practice bunker and a practice

putting green," added Jonny.

One of the latest projects at the centre involves the addition of a top tracer system onto the driving range.

"This is another benefit to the golfer at Blackwood Golf Centre," Jonny said. "Computer sensors track the golf ball when the golfer hits it on the driving range and shows the exact path it took to the destination. This then acts as a teaching aid

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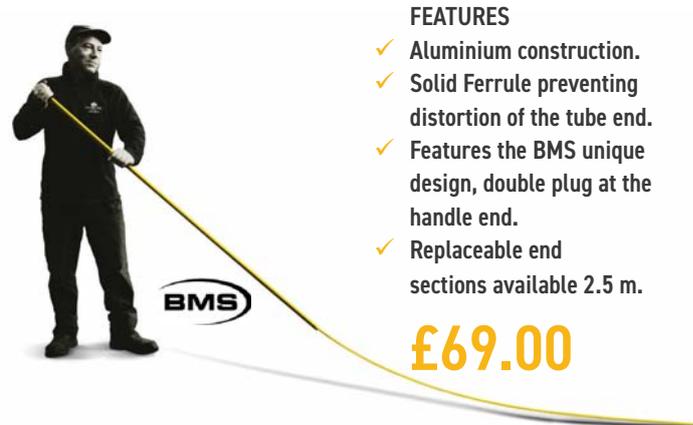
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The dry weather in July did present us with a few problems with areas drying out, but everything is back to normal now. It's been a pretty good year for greenkeeping in my opinion



to the golfer, helping them improve their game."

With two 18 hole golf courses comes a lot of maintenance over the year but Jonny and his team have dedicated programmes in place to ensure the courses are always looking at their best.

"The greens are cut daily and the tees and aprons are cut at least three times per week," said Jonny. "And the rough is mostly cut once per week but, in some areas, twice per week."

"In terms of cutting height, the greens are cut at three millimetres and, in the winter, up to five millimetres. Our tees are cut at 10 to 13 millimetres and the fairways, 12 to 15 millimetres. The rough would be cut at up to 40 millimetres."

"I try to teach all the jobs to all the staff so that we have all angles covered when staff take their holidays. The courses have been in superb condition all summer long and that is something the golfers have often commended us for this year."

"The dry weather in July did present us with a few problems with areas drying out, but everything is back to normal now. It's been a pretty good year for greenkeeping in my opinion," said Jonny.

Thanks to the top notch maintenance by Jonny and the team, Blackwood Golf Centre is open all year round for golfers to get a game in. At the end of the main season there are a number of tasks that are carried out in preparation for winter.

"We autumn overhaul all our greens," said Jonny. "That means hollow tining or solid tining and deep scarifying, as well as overseeding and topdressing. Our tees are verti-drained and sanded along with the aprons and surrounds."

"Then we would use a Shockwave down the fairways in the winter months. This is deep rotating knives that sends vibrations down into the ground. It reduces the soil compaction, improving the soil aeration and revitalises the fairway. We carry this out in-house as part of our normal maintenance plan," he adds.

Jonny has noticed the climate is getting wetter as the years go on, but says he can adapt the maintenance programmes to suit the conditions.

At Blackwood, the golf club is a separate entity to the golf centre and there is always good communications between the two, via emails and whatsapp groups, as to how the courses are playing or any other important information that the members need to know.

Jonny also has plans to carry out some extra work over the winter involving a new

tee and other practical jobs.

"We are going to build a new tee at the twelfth hole," he said. "And, we are going to carry out some drainage work on the fifteenth. Also, we are going to fill in three of the bunkers and drain some wet areas beside the eleventh and eighteenth greens."

"There are five lakes on the two courses which help provide good drainage and one of them supplies the irrigation system as well," points out Jonny.

In addition, Jonny has a wooded area that





//

Now, we have to use sand and some iron to acidify the ground to try and control them, but it can be like fighting a losing battle. There is no real cure for trying to control them now

has to be maintained as well. During the construction of the courses in the early days there were 14,000 trees planted between holes that have to be thinned and looked after.

“Four of our lads are suitably trained on the use of chainsaws, so we can carry out most of that work ourselves, but obviously if there was a job that was above our capabilities we would bring in an outside contractor to do that,” said Jonny.

Most of the weeds around the courses are

the broadleaved weeds which are controlled by selective weed killer treatment.

“We struggle with some pests, mostly worm activity, which are a big issue now on parkland golf courses because the use of pesticides is now forbidden in this area.”

“Now, we have to use sand and some iron to acidify the ground to try and control them, but it can be like fighting a losing battle. There is no real cure for trying to control them now.”

“There is also a lot of wildlife on the

course including rabbits, foxes, badgers, stoats, deer and plenty of birds. They were all here before us so we just have to live with them being there,” he said.

Staff training at the centre is ongoing and an outside company is regularly brought in to update Jonny and the staff on health and safety regulations.

“At the minute, I think greenkeeping is struggling as an industry and it is hard to get new entrants to take on this job as a career. I know a lot of courses are only getting one or



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two replies to any jobs they have posted. I think it is the weather that puts people off the most about coming into this industry, rather than pay and conditions,” he suggests.

There is a mixture of brands in the machinery shed including Kubota and Isuzu tractors, but most of the equipment bear the familiar green and yellow colours of John Deere.

“In terms of machinery that really help us, the John Deere Aercore walk behind aerator is vital for the greens. Plus the Ultraspreader Topdresser is an essential piece of

equipment that has made topdressing possible via a one man operation now,” said Jonny.

Under a five year John Deere finance package, the centre has recently purchased the following John Deere machines: 8900A PrecisionCut fairway mower; 2500E hybrid electric greens triplex mower; 2653B PrecisionCut tees and surrounds triplex mower plus two TH 6x4 Gator utility vehicles.

Also included in the purchase was a Trimax Snake articulating rotary mower and a Buffalo debris blower.

Jonny said he is very pleased with the new equipment, explaining how the machines have boosted production and efficiency.

Jonny said: “We have been using John Deere equipment at Blackwood since 2003 and have always found the equipment very reliable and easy to use.”

“With this new deal we replaced two of our older John Deere Gators with the TH 6x4 vehicles and the rest are additional purchases in our fleet which now consists of twelve John Deere machines in total.”

“The John Deere equipment does a great job and the backup we receive from the dealer is first class. They are very reliable and, we think, represent good value for money and longevity.”



The John Deere equipment does a great job and the backup we receive from the dealer is first class. They are very reliable and, we think, represent good value for money and longevity



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Sene Valley Golf Club

Let the long journey begin



Sene Valley Golf Club in Hythe, Kent have embarked on a long journey to improve the course's infrastructure that involves all aspects; cost-effective greenkeeping, long term development, agronomic stability, replacing an ageing machinery fleet and improving the course. **Phil Helmn MG** has been tasked with delivering this ambitious project within the next three years

Sene Valley Golf Club is located at the top of Blackhouse Hill, just outside Hythe in Kent, and is a welcome and memorable test of golf to all levels of player. It offers an undulating challenge to players of all abilities, with many natural hazards, tricky par threes and well protected greens.

Sene Valley boasts beautiful undulating fairways due to its coastline layout on many of its holes. It is not, however, a seaside links, but has more of a cliff top, downland feel which is soon realised on arrival as the course weaves through stunning pine and birch trees, with spectacular vistas across the English Channel seemingly from every direction. Sene Valley isn't a long course, but those who turn up expecting a glut of

birdies will only live to regret it.

The land which is now Sene Valley was once the home to Hythe Golf Club. Hythe was founded in October 1894 and occupied the land up until the outbreak of WW2. In its heyday, it was an extremely respected club, boasting full membership made up of primarily wealthy local businesspeople and flourished throughout the early 1900s. Many famous pro golfers visited the club for testimonial/exhibition matches which added to the club's local stature and popularity.

This all ended with the outbreak of WW2 and the land being requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence due to its cliff top strategic location. Unfortunately, as a result, the land and its buildings were extensively damaged, and the membership did not have



the resources following the end of the war to conduct the necessary repairs to both the course and clubhouse. Hythe Golf Club remained abandoned for decades, eventually reverting to farmland for grazing, and the club disappeared.

In 1965, The Radnor Estate purchased the site of the former Hythe Golf Course on behalf of Folkestone Golf Club, which leased their golf course on the Radnor Estate at the time. They engaged Henry Cotton, whose playing days were over but, by the mid 1960s, had moved into teaching and course design. Cotton had notched up wins at The Open three times in 1934, 1937, and 1948. In addition to those popular victories, Cotton also won thirty tournaments in Europe. He played for his country in three Ryder Cup

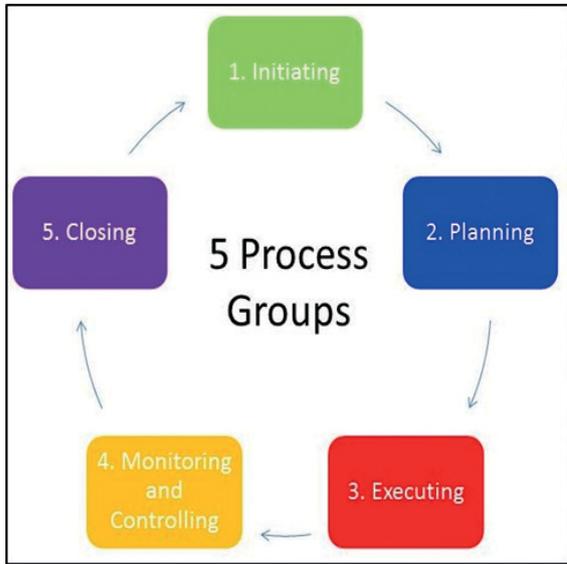
matches and twice captained the British team. Cotton's brief was to design the new course using the Hythe layout as the bones as a starter. The Estate also constructed a new clubhouse, and the new club was then leased back to the members in 1966. So, the present Sene Valley Course occupies most of the original area of the old Hythe Course, but the configuration of the holes is different.

The club's vision

I was extremely fortunate to be asked to join the Sene Valley team and begin work on a vision plan for both the existing greenkeeping team and the golf course. The plan involved mapping out the next three years with key objectives and S.M.A.R.T.

goals (or milestones) plotted along the journey. The foundation to this elementary process was based on the following:

1. Cost-effective greenkeeper knowledge to highlight significant cost savings on machinery and materials within the existing budget which could then be reinvested into the club
2. Mapping the long-term development of the team, the agronomics and the presentation of the golf course. This is achieved by developing the right personnel with the right values and knowledge whilst having the backstop of expertise always on hand
3. Team building, culture development and building motivated teams will translate



into success and elevated levels of presentation for the club

- 4. Long term gains are achieved by understanding that golf clubs are businesses, where a quality golf course not only enhances the enjoyment for its members, but can also attract customers from far and wide which helps to generate greater profits for the club to re-invest.

The Timeline

Year 1 - Engagement and Foundation Building

Agronomic assessment. Maintenance programmes established. Budget analysis a priority. Best practice processes implemented resulting in high standards of presentation. Team culture outlined. Bring on team skills on a phased improvement plan.

Year 2 - Team Development and Processes Instilled

Innovative culture and values instilled in the team. Enhancement of fertility programmes, continue mentoring and developing

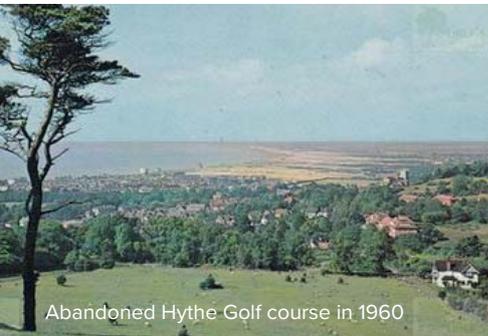
individuals. Introduce training programmes for the wider team and outline potential course development projects (if applicable).

Year 3 - Agronomic Stability and Course Presentation Embedded

Team become confident, dynamic, self-sufficient and respected as a professional unit within the club. Golf course on a sound agronomic path where cost effective programmes firmly in place.

Building a believable path

Officials at Sene Valley are genuinely forward thinking and realise that the club's long term success is reliant on a solid plan for the future. The greens committee and I have been tasked with creating a vision document or blueprint for alterations and improvements to the golf course with associated costs. Costing such work is vital for the finance committee to allocate funds and make provision for the works. Like me, you will discover finance people simply hate surprises and, by producing a costed believable plan of works, keeps them



Build a believable path



The team left to right: Ricky Hogben, Colin Whitfield, Phil, Andy Crisford, Jake Smith and Marc Spearpoint. Tristan Crisford not present on day of photo



Team Values (Phil Helmn 2021)



Preparing a tee for extension

happy(ish)!

Like most large projects, producing a document of this size can seem quite daunting, but by far the best way to tackle any large-scale job is to break it down into smaller, more manageable pieces. The process therefore initially involved identifying the large problems/issues the golf course suffered from, then moved onto smaller issues which needed improving. With these 'problem' items firmly at the top

of the 'list', it was a matter of breaking the remainder of the jobs into hole-by-hole smaller issues.

Obviously, the overall aim of the committee was to picture what the golf course should look like regarding visual appearance and, just as importantly, ensure it was agronomically stable. All this 'visual' improvement needed to be supported with a solid behind-the-scenes infrastructure to support the future developments.

The key areas we decided required improvement were:

- Replace an ageing irrigation system (25+ years old)
- Replace an ageing machinery fleet (15+ years old)
- Improve greens which were prone to waterlogging, predominantly poa and high thatch levels



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Getting Personal

Steve Hunt - a slightly worrying obsession with petrol and matches ... and we didn't know about crisps either!

Who are you? Steve Hunt, General Manager at Sene Valley Golf Club.

Family status. I have three lovely children aged 7, 11 and 14 with my partner.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Achieving my current level of responsibility within the golf club industry.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think?

Despite the ups and downs 'boy done good'!

Which famous people wind you up? Anyone with self importance!

What job would you love, other than your own? To be a secret agent (preferably with 00 status)!

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Turning up to a black tie (complete with dickie bow) when it wasn't! Then I always remember the classic Del Boy and Rodney turning up to a wake dressed as Batman and Robin!

What is your favourite film? Happy Gilmore - a true golfing classic!

What scares you? Failure.

What would your autobiography be called...and who would play you in the film? I did it my way with Peter Griffin (from the Family Guy).

What is your favourite sport? Darts and football.

What would you cast into room 101? All deceitful people

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Medieval England - especially in the reign of King Henry VIII.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? Just try to be happy in life.

What's your favourite smell? Petrol or burnt matches but not necessarily together!!!

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Seve Ballesteros, King Henry VIII and Winston Churchill.



What's the best advice you have ever been given? Be honest.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? All crisps go 'out of date' on a Saturday!

What's your favourite piece of kit? Our Pro Force leaf blower.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Queen - Greatest Hits, Ed Sheeran - Divide and Bon Jovi - Slippery When Wet.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Before we confirm a date, will it be raining on our society golf day in middle of March? - I was asked the previous September!

What three words best describes yourself? Honest, dependable and easy-going.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper? The harder you work the more doors will open for you in our industry.

What talent would you like to have? Mind reading.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Introduce a capped limit on rising fuel prices.



Waterlogged green

- Improve drainage to four holes prone to waterlogging during winter months
- Create a management plan to remedy overgrown woodland areas (Sene Valley is a downland course)
- Create a plan to remedy overgrown natural areas revert to native species
- Modernise all bunkers (prone to waterlogging/obsolete placement/ageing construction)
- Rebuild larger tees to replace small teeing areas for amount of play
- Invest in team numbers and training and personal development
- Improve communication between team and members ensuring the message was delivered effectively
- Create a list of hole by hole detailed/specific improvements 1-18

Now I know what you might be thinking, wow that seems a lot of work! Where do you start on such a mission? Well, once all the areas to be tackled have been thoroughly identified, the next part of the process is to record this information and begin working on an order of works. Obviously, the priority must be given to jobs which will reduce the risk to the course deteriorating further or

pose a significant risk to the health and wellbeing of the agronomic stability of the greens and tees as an example.

Other decisions can be made based on cosmetics and infrastructure which have reduced risk to the course and club. However you decide to organise the tasks in hand, it is vital that you follow a process, and by far the best one I have used with great success is the model originally discovered by Henri Fayol. These five steps of managing the overall project is key to success. It formalises the initial idea, the planning, carrying out the works, constantly monitoring the individual tasks progress and finally closing each completed element.

The underpinning key to our overall success falls down to two key elements. Communication is vitally important and, to that end, we have instigated a video platform to 'get the message out' as and when it happens. We've decided to video every key job as it happens to reduce negativity and involve as many people in our journey as possible. The other, equally important factor is to improve the team's culture so that all these amazing differences can flow more freely. We have introduced a set of three team values which everyone is encouraged to



Andy Crisford mowing the rough

What's in the shed?

- John Deere Fairway 8700D cylinder mower (5 unit)
- Toro Rough Groundsmaster mower (rotary)
- John Deere Triple 2550 ride on mower (mixture of 11 and 8 blade units) x 3
- Cushman heavy duty utility vehicles x 2
- Toro dedicated sprayer
- John Deere HPX15E utility vehicles x 3
- Topdresser attachment for heavy duty vehicle
- Redexim Verti-Drain aerator attachment
- John Deere 50hp 4052M mid tractor
- John Deere 30hp 3033R compact tractor
- Kubota compact loader
- Thatchaway cassette system for triple mower

Toro rotary gang unit attachment 1200

Toro ProForce leaf blower

Imants Shockwave 155 attachment

Tractor trailer



demonstrate daily. They are:

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2. Obsession for perfection. Strive to do everything ‘brilliantly’. Continually being committed to improvement. Always look for ways or methods to improve
3. Work with pride. Demonstrate ownership in everything you do, taking pride in your work. Display a keen eye for detail

The whole Sene Valley team, and let’s not forget the membership, have started a long but exciting journey indeed! In the first six months of my new role at Sene Valley the foundations have been firmly recognised and embraced by everyone. We have begun involving as many members as possible and increased our communication levels. We are on our way, so watch this space for future developments and hopefully some great updates in the future!



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Hull Golf Club

Norton firing on all cylinders

On a rather windy autumn day David Mears visited and chatted to **David Norton**, the new Course Manager at Hull Golf Club, just a year into his appointment. They spent time discussing his plans for the course and what had been tackled already

David Norton, born in nearby Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire, has always loved the outdoors and playing golf; his handicap is 1. When the time came to forge a career, David knew his decision was a “no brainer” and that he must be outdoors. He was considering working in a National Park, however, an opportunity came up of a position in greenkeeping at his local golf club. David plumped for the Beverley greenkeeping option. “It was a great job,” he said. “I knew very soon that it was the right thing to do!” Asked about what or who inspired him, David said “No one really inspired me. I was, and am still, very self-motivated.”

He was determined to succeed and progress his career. As with many in greenkeeping in the North, David studied for and passed his NVQ 2 and 3 exams at Askham Bryan College on the outskirts of York. He maintained the momentum in his work and was most pleased when he won the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award in 1990. The Toro scholarship included a six-week residential turf management study course at the University of Massachusetts in the USA, a trip to the Golf Industry Show and a visit to the Toro factory. That’s quite an achievement and has been so for other students over the years.

David’s career progressed and he moved to Mid Yorkshire Golf Club to grow it in and set it up. Then, in 1992, he moved to the Belfry as Head Greenkeeper. Whilst there, he hosted the English Open 1992 and the 1993 Ryder Cup. David moved







We also thinned more trees in particular locations to allow more air and light into key areas. We've also planted over three hundred trees, again to protect boundaries



Work begins on the new path



to Forest Pines in 1995 to grow in and set it up from the beginning. During his time there he achieved much, developing the course and eventually seeing it become an award-winning 27-hole championship golf course with three loops of nine holes winding through the pines. He was instrumental in planning a splendid new greenkeeping facility built further away from the clubhouse when the hotel development occurred. After twenty-five years there, David accepted the position of Course Manager at Hull Golf Club a year ago.

David works with the Club Secretary and Managing Director regarding budgets and finance and, now that he's been in the post for a year with future plans known, this will be developed. He has been instrumental in developing the club's 5-year strategic plan incorporating major course improvements and infrastructure.

The club has a greenkeeping team of six headed by David. Most have been with the

club for a number of years. As David said; "The youngest member Roy Carmichael, in his early twenties, has been here for five years. Gareth Brown, the Deputy Head Greenkeeper, is the longest serving and been here for at least twenty-five years!" The others are Ricky Boniface, Rich Coulson and Paul Thacker and their service ranges up to twenty years. David believes that the fact that all have long service must mean something.

The team are reliable and hardworking and are trained to carry out the mix of greenkeeping jobs. All are able to undertake the regular greenkeeping work and have the necessary qualifications for hazardous work too, e.g. spraying and chainsaw work. They all maintain familiarity with current legislation, including Health & Safety protocols. Ongoing training is undertaken as required. Most jobs on the course are tackled in-house by the team and only occasionally will a contractor be brought in

for major projects or when specialist equipment is required. "The main contractors who work in with us for alterations are Fineturf. This year, for example, equipment was needed for the 'drill 'n' fill' project."

The soil profile is mainly clay which, as David says, throws up lots of challenges! The site is not vast, being under a hundred acres, and is totally surrounded by residential, many upmarket, properties. The close proximity of a number of these properties does raise concerns and one of David's tasks has been alterations to the course to protect boundaries and to encourage play away from them. Knowing David's skills, these alterations came as no surprise and, in his short period of time in the job, work has already included: creating a new pathway last winter; moving the 8th green and hole away from the boundary, then altering the 7th and 15th holes for safety and to keep players away from



Ecosol undertaking drill 'n' fill in front of the clubhouse



The completed path



Apart from clearing leaves, which are blown from playing areas and then mulched - a huge job for us and many others right now - we'll start bunker work in the second week of December

boundaries, plus hiring a tree spade to transplant fifteen mature trees. Certain trees were really in the wrong place or too close together in any event. Replanting also assisted the protection of the boundaries and, as with the 7th and 15th developments, aimed to encourage play away from these.

"We also thinned more trees in particular locations to allow more air and light into key areas," David explained. "We've also planted

over three hundred trees, again to protect boundaries. One thing we have majored on is the inclusion of species best suited to our golf course."

Asked about other projects, David commented: "Apart from clearing leaves, which are blown from playing areas and then mulched - a huge job for us and many others right now - we'll start bunker work in the second week of December." This work

will mean reworking fairway bunkers on holes 5, 6 and 15 to complement tree work already carried out. "This winter, work to reduce future maintenance will be carried out using Durabunker geosynthetic bunker edges; nice and strong!" David added.

One thing that David is keen to bring to fruition is the installation of a new greenkeeping facility. They have run out of space in the present one. "New sheds are



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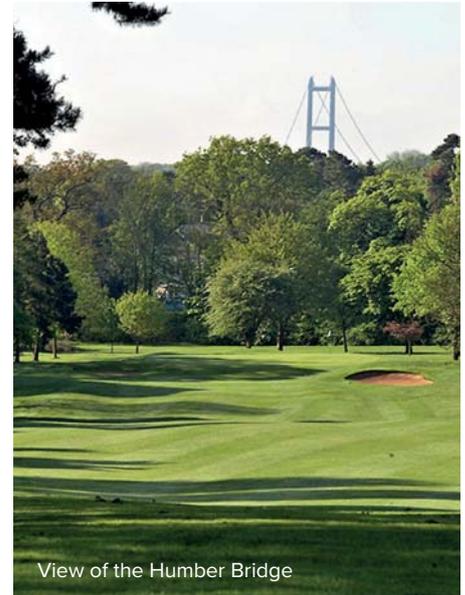




Adamson's, just five minutes away, are the 'go to' supplier for most of the club's greenkeeping needs. So easy to pop round, I've dealt with them for years. They are friendly and helpful with a depth of knowledge



Altering the 8th green



View of the Humber Bridge

What's in the shed?

John Deere 220B pedestrian mower
 Toro Greenmaster 3400D Triflex mowers x 2
 John Deere 2500B x 3
 John Deere 7700A fairway mowers x 2
 Toro Groundmaster 3500D Sidewinder
 John Deere 1580 Terrain Cut
 Lastec Articulator 4520
 John Deere 855D Gator XUV
 John Deere 2030A Pro Gator
 Kubota RTV500 utility vehicle
 New Holland Boomer 3050 tractor
 New Holland TN75D tractor
 New Holland TN75S tractor
 Honda quad bike
 Cushman Groom Master bunker rake
 Kubota KX71-3 digger
 TruTurf roller
 GKB Sand Injector/Aerator
 Vredo overseeder
 Charterhouse Verti-Drain
 John Deere Aercore
 Sisis slitters
 Buffalo blower
 Echo Bearcat chipper
 Rotary hand mowers
 Strimmers/hedge trimmers
 Knapsack/hand blowers
 Chainsaws
 Small tools/kit

planned," said David, "and we are awaiting prices."

As to the future, David said; "We are looking forward to implementing a programme of major course improvements!" It is clear that the forward thinking of the club for development of the course and facilities was what probably attracted David to the job!

The machinery list (see What's in the shed?) shows that Hull Golf Club is not a one brand club, as it has a mixture of brands, with main kit from John Deere, Toro and New Holland. They have two main supplying dealerships: F G Adamson & Son, for John Deere, and Russell's of Gilberdyke for Toro and New Holland. Adamson's, just five minutes away, are the "go to" supplier for most of the club's greenkeeping needs. "So easy to pop round," says David. "I've dealt with them for years. They are friendly and helpful with a depth of knowledge."

Servicing work is carried out mostly in-house or by the two dealerships as necessary.

On the environmental and Health & Safety side, David explains that he and the club are keen to ensure compliance. All waste at the

greenkeeping facility: oil, grease cartridges, aerosols, chemical packaging, oil filters, catering oil, contaminated rags, etc. is collected and disposed of professionally by Acumen Waste Services Ltd., with full audit trails provided. The club also installed a ClearWater washpad water recycling system a few years ago. David was pleased to see this in situ when he arrived as he'd had two systems at Forest Pines and was most impressed with their performance. The original system was ClearWater's very first installation nearly twenty years ago and it was he who assisted ClearWater with the development and treatment of the system. He had no hesitation ordering a second system at Forest Pines, which was necessitated by the relocation of the greenkeeping facility, and this was a larger three hose system.

Keeping machinery clean and preventing pollution is a must for David, as is keeping diesel fuel safe and dispensed from a properly banded fuel tank. First Aid training has been carried out with all greenkeepers, with David and his deputy nominated First Aiders. David also has responsibility for





Tree spade in action



Bunker work in progress

Health & Safety.

“Disease has not been a problem but the leatherjackets in the spring were. They have now been treated with Acelepryn, but control is much harder since the product that actually controlled them was banned.” He added, “the odd fox appears but what we did see this year during lockdown was deer.”

Talking of lockdown and Covid-19, I asked if the club had been affected badly by the

pandemic. “I think we were lucky,” he said, “with only two affected and then not badly.” Did the pandemic bring any positives? “I suppose it was the ability to get on with certain projects knowing that there were no players on the course!”

We chatted about the state of the industry. David thought that it was slowly improving and that greenkeeping is not as undervalued as it was. He added that “It’s not really an issue here.”

One thing that never changes are the expectations of some players however. Some do not really know how much work goes into keeping the course in top condition. As David put it, “they see the golf from fabulous courses here and abroad on TV and expect the playing surfaces to be the same at their club; Our budgets are a million miles away from some of these courses, as are the green fees!” David added, “we call it The Augusta Syndrome!”

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Getting Personal

David Norton - never wants second best ... or tick boxes!



Who are you? David Norton, Course Manager at Hull Golf Club.

Family status? Married with two grown up children.

Who's your hero and why? Nick Faldo or Seve Ballesteros.

What would you change about yourself? Wish I'd learnt to do a flick flack run when younger.

What's your guilty pleasure? Ice cream, jelly sweets and bitter.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Being Head Greenkeeper for the 1993 Ryder Cup.

What are your pet peeves? Not finishing jobs properly.

If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be? Alaska.

What's the best part of your job? Course improvements.

... and the worst? Boring tick boxes.

What's your favourite sport? Golf and cricket.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Family holiday to remember then take my friends to play the world's best golf courses.

Do you have any bad habits? Never wanting second best.

... or any good ones? Never wanting second best!

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Your children come to live with you, you don't go to live with them.

Favourite smell? Cooking.

What do you do in your spare time? Play golf and cricket and keep as active as possible.

What's your favourite piece of kit? My driver!!

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Organised, tidy and indulgent.

What talent would you like to have? To be a better putter!



There were more deer on the course during lockdown

One thing our American friends can't offer, however, is a Grade II listed Georgian clubhouse! Kirk Ella Hall, built for William Kirkby a Hull solicitor in 1778-79, with 19th century additions to the left which is now the clubhouse.

The club has an active membership and the club, keen on social activities, hosts a number of events which are well supported. Not only the course but the dining facilities, staff and food receive excellent reviews online and social media, as does the excellent Pro Shop.

Hull Golf Club is a par 70 parkland layout measuring just less than 6300 yards from the back tees, yet, despite recent innovations in club and ball technology, John Dockar's course record of 64 has remained intact for nearly a quarter of a century.

The club has a long history of producing top players including several England internationals;

one being Rich Coulson (now one of the greenkeeping team!) and also Richard Finch who won the New Zealand Open and, more famously, the 2008 Irish Open where he fell in the river while hitting his shot into the 18th green.

The club unsurprisingly has a long waiting list on all categories of membership.

The club has received positive publicity and benefitted from hosting a number of televised tournaments such as the "Trilby Tour."

"As the club's website states: Out on the course the opening four holes offer variety in terms of distance, undulation, and par, and give you a sense of the challenges that lie ahead."

<https://www.hullgolfclub.co.uk/>

Photographs:
David Norton
and David Mears



A brief history

The first golf club in the Hull area was Hull Golf Club, founded in 1904 by nine local golfers under the guiding spirit and first captain Haggitt Colbeck, a solicitor.

Originally nine holes, the course, sited at Anlaby Road (just three miles from the present club) was extended to eighteen holes in 1906.

In 1907 the Ladies committee was formed, the first Lady captain being Mrs J.A. Brown.

During World War I (and World War II), golf continued to be played, but major competitions were suspended.

In 1921, for reasons that are unclear, the original club was 'wound up' and replaced by Hull Golf Club (1921) Limited, the present company. The clubhouse and course remained unchanged, but only for 3 years.

In 1924, a road and house building programme by Hull City Corporation forced the club to move to its present site at Kirk Ella.

The new course (18 holes) was designed by the famous James Braid, and originally opened on the 21st May 1925 by club captain R.B. (Bruce) Johnston. Later that day, Braid played an exhibition match alongside club dignitaries.

It is one of the region's premier golf courses with over a hundred years of history, and boasting views over the Humber and the towers of the famous Humber Bridge.

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Flixton Golf Club

The Mersey beats us!

The impact of climate change is seldom far away for **Paul Barrow**, who has to run the gauntlet of water and environment agencies to keep his course free from inundation, reports Greg Rhodes

Whoever claims that managing a 9-hole golf course is half as hard as that for an 18-hole one needs a swift rethink. So says Paul Barrow, Head Greenkeeper at Flixton Golf Club, Greater Manchester, who has all the experience, and maintenance headaches, to back up his statement.

With just one full-time assistant, Paul has his work cut out every day of the year, as the threat of flooding from the River Mersey,

which runs alongside the 9-hole course, looms large.

The image of Paul standing alone in a sea of floodwater last year tells a graphic tale of the club's constant battle against the elements.

In time, the waters subsided and Flixton opened for business once more. But occupying Paul's thoughts is the nagging question; when will it happen again?

Paul's been a member of Flixton since he was nine, so the 32-year-old has enjoyed a

generation of golf, competing against what he states is a challenging parkland round for any player.

But let's go back. A graduate in Sports Science from Myerscough, Paul spent his first few years working in the professional shop at Dunham Forest before applying for a post at equally high status Delamere - "the links inland and a great course to learn the ropes."

A fulfilling four-year spell there culminated in a job offer back at Dunham, where he



spent three years further honing his greenkeeping skills.

The siren call home proved too powerful for locally born and bred Paul, who took up the head's post at Flixton in 2015.

"Every course is learning curve," he says, "with different conditions and microclimates requiring differing seed mixes to deliver optimum playability."

As an avid golfer, Paul sees a course from both perspectives - a user and a deliverer.

"For golfers, presentation is everything

and the first thing they ask is 'what are the greens like?'" It's all about going back to basics, Paul believes. "A clean, tidy course with well-cut greens gives the kind of presentation golfer want. Our greens are holding up well, so they don't have too many gripes here."

Member expectations are only one side of the coin; growing numbers of pay and play golfers demand perfection, which means the pressure's on clubs like Flixton to do their utmost to provide it, especially locally when

they can enjoy the delights of Dunham Forest and Delamere.

Meeting those expectation relies on quality groundscare, helped by the tools and machinery to do the job. "We have a healthy budget," Paul declares, "and our fleet is improving steadily, thanks to the club's council members being more aware of what our work entails."

When golf was written off during lockdown, Paul used the fallow period as a great opportunity to help acclimatise the



Members can help golf virgins adjust to the game, but we have a role too



Paul Barrow

committee to the realities of greenkeeping. "I invited them to look over what we do," he recalls. "Their eyes were opened when they saw broken machinery."

Closure meant days working alone for Paul, as assistant Anthony Cox had been furloughed, however, "he came in to cut the rough for me, which really helped."

No play brought welcome relief in one sense. "With no flags, furniture or golfers, my job was a little easier - no moving markers either. I was freed of all the usual chores. The three and a half to four days it took us when golfers were on course dropped to two and a half during lockdown."

And the bounceback since then is a revelation. "Member numbers have doubled," Paul reports - perhaps a double-edged sword for the greens team.

Although officially 9 holes, "technically we have 10," says Paul, "as you play the 9th to one green as a Par 4 and play to another green as a Par 5, so we have two greens on one hole."

Nine-hole courses have another hurdle to surmount, Paul explains. "If pay and play golfers are used to an 18-hole round, then come here, they don't really want to play the same holes twice but prefer an ever-changing challenge across 18 holes. Also, the way the new World Handicap System works gives golfers more shots on a more

difficult course to try to make the game fairer for everyone but, in turn, 9 hole-courses have to give players a real challenge so they can play on them more frequently."

Introduced this spring, the system has overcomplicated matters and will take two years for players to adjust, Paul believes. "More pay and play is great in one sense but the downside is that golfers new to the game will turn up not knowing about the clothing to wear or rules of the game."

"Do they realise they have to replace divots, they can't take trolleys on to tees and greens and they should let players behind them move ahead if they are playing too slowly?."

"Members can help golf virgins adjust to the game, but we have a role too and I take it on myself to try to inform diplomatically by saying 'I don't know if you know that . . .' and that can smooth the way."

And to press home the point, Paul keeps a bucket of divot mix on each tee. "At the end of every week, volunteers go out on course to fill any holes on the fairways."

Paul engages four or five helpers, three days a week and for four- to six-hour stints. "Tending the course is a nice thing for them to do. I have to train them on some greenkeeping jobs, but as they are mostly ex-golfers, they know to look out for players, and golf balls."



The usual health and safety measures apply to them too. "They have to sign in and sign out and wear hi vis jackets. Our liability insurance is in place to cover them for any mishaps."

Volunteers have had "a massive impact", Paul states. "Most of them have been members at Flixton or nearby, so they know the quality I expect, but Anthony and I still need to manage our ten greens and putting area."

Speaking of Anthony, "he came here from Worsley Golf Club in 1991. I can trust him on anything. We've built up a great working relationship. I'm always avidly looking at

course presentation, Anthony's full on the greenkeeping aspects. If I miss anything, he won't."

Flixton is in a privileged position, many would argue. "The course is protected indefinitely and, like the William Rowe course nearby which has sadly folded, we are on a flood plain and the local council would not build on it."

"You never like to see courses shut, as the more sport and leisure facilities we have the better, but if they have to, why not turn them into nature walks and wildlife diversity areas, rather than building on them. There are plenty of brownfield sites to take housing."

Like many a greenkeeper, Paul is happy to gain feedback from players. "I prefer people to ask about something they are unsure or unhappy about, rather than simply criticise."

The going's good though. "The word is that our greens are getting better and better. A couple of golfers who play lots of other courses say they are constantly improving, which is great to hear."

Paul's "back to basics" approach embraces a programme of feeding and aeration. "We aerate weekly at appropriate times, star-slitting down to three or four inches and deeper in summer, feeding the grass to boost growth and cutting to 4mm

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After rain, they dry off in thirty minutes to an hour, instead of the three to four hours previously and they are far firmer now - a major improvement on the squelchyness we had before



throughout that period.”

The club strives to stay open every day of the year and, to that end, installed extensive drainage under the greens in the time since Paul arrived. “After rain, they dry off in thirty minutes to an hour, instead of the three to four hours previously and they are far firmer now - a major improvement on the squelchyness we had before.”

“A main drain runs down either side of each green, taking water from the 3m centre drains under the putting surfaces. From there, water runs into ditches and existing drains. We’ve built a stone-filled four-foot deep sump pit to help take water away from the course.”

“The evergreens lining Flixton also aid water take-up from the parkland course, but we still pray that it doesn’t rain or freeze because dry days are the prompt to handle the more challenging projects, like cutting.”

River proximity brings its own issues. “If the Mersey level rises above our two outfalls, we’re in trouble as nothing drains off the course,” Paul explains. “I monitor the river level constantly and, during lockdown, had to see it rise from low, to medium then

high from October onwards. Unlike other courses on the Mersey, such as Northenden and Withington, we don’t have pumps and flood gates that we can open when we need to.”

“The water took six to nine weeks to leave the course, though the silt residue greened up a few of our greens and fairways, but we also had to clear tonnes of rubbish away, though the second time we were flooded, far less was left behind so the filter systems on the river must be doing their bit.”

The sheer torrent of floodwater wreaks havoc with the Mersey banks, Paul adds. “It washed huge chunks away as the river shifted its natural course. Half the seventh tee went because the earth underneath it started to crack.”

“The sixth green is right next to the 7th tee, so we fear we could lose that too.”

The team is planting willow hedging - a process known as faggoting - near the bank in a bid to avoid what Paul says is inevitable.

With loss of revenue uppermost in his mind, Paul has approached the river authority but “they were not interested in compensating us. It was just a blessing we

had lockdown when the flooding came.”

The club now promotes to new golfers to shore up income. We want communities to come down here and use our facilities,” Paul pleads

Still with course drainage, Paul has just brought in sports contractor Danvic to vertidrain the fairways. “This is the first time for us since I started at Flixton,” says Paul. “We have talked about it and have our own smaller Verti-Drain, which we use to do tees, greens and approaches down to seven inches, but we specified eight and more depth in future, as it only takes days getting in a contractor to do the fairways, whereas it would take weeks if we did it.”

“The plan is to repeat the process annually around October time, maybe going down to nine inches or varying the depth upwards. The danger is you create a pan level; a black layer where water just sits.”

Planting plans

After talks with the club president, Paul is introducing wildflower mixes in strips, edging the course in a bid to attract bees and other insects to the site. “We’re trialling



The river authority were not interested in compensating us. It was just a blessing we had lockdown when the flooding came



Assistant Anthony Cox



What's in the shed?

Baroness LM315 Greens Triple - used for cutting greens. We also have a set of verticut units and tees/approach units that are very easy to change over

John Deere 2500e - which we now use as a second greens mower for big comps so 2 of us can go out and double cut, also get used throughout the year

Deutch-Fahr Agrokid 45 tractor and Ransomes trailed gangs - tractor is used for all things but the gangs are mainly for the rough in the summer

John Deere utility vehicle - used all year round, mainly for any little jobs like going out changing holes, bunkers etc.

Toro Reelmaster 5410 fairway mower

them on a couple of areas - the president is keen to go ahead."

A selection of different species of four to five foot high pines have also been planted in protected areas. "I want more evergreens as, in winter, the course can look bare if you only have deciduous trees - and evergreens need less maintenance."

Arb practices can bring down the wrath of neighbouring residents, however, as Paul notes. "They see us cutting down trees and complain. We explain that we are not doing

it to annoy them but because specimens are either dead or dangerous. It's about looking more down the line, not the here and now."

"Usually twenty to thirty trees are felled over winter - some to reduce shade on the course - but we plant as many as we can to replace them. One hundred went in last year in two nursery areas at the back of the 1st and 2nd tees. Then we'll transfer them to other parts of the course when they reach six to eight feet."

In more wildlife activity, volunteers have

fitted bat boxes here and there. "A university student was researching bats and she put some up too," Paul says.

"That's a really good move as I want to encourage more young people to engage with us by keeping areas as parkland beauty spots that they can enjoy."

Conceding that golfers like "greens, fairways, roughs and bunkers", Paul reduced Flixton's complement of sand traps by two last year, to stand at thirty-six.

"You don't need too many," he declares.

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“Two or three a hole is plenty - professionals find pitching up out of bunkers easier than negotiating hollows, bumps and swales.”

“Flooding isn’t usually a problem, but it’s better for them to fill up and draw water off the greens and approaches.”

Water isn’t too much of a drain on the club coffers either. “Abstraction rights for the borehole that was sunk before my time allows us unrestricted access during summer, bringing a massive cost saving on mains supply.” He doesn’t have to think twice about actuating the irrigation system. “It’s on at night usually and controlled from the shed,” he says.

Dark waters

Paul passes into darker waters when the conversation shifts to talk of greenkeeping’s future. “I fear we’re a dying breed,” he states. “The pressure we are under to deliver excellence is immense, and many young lads prefer to go into other industries. They don’t relish losing their weekends and getting up at the crack of dawn, when they can earn more as an electrician or a plumber.

“The club treat us really well – I have no cause to complain but the greenkeeping sector needs to start considering how to

attract more young people before it’s too late. When I’m thinking that I’m the last generation of greenkeepers, that’s scary. I cannot see an answer to the problem.

“The apprentices that have come here don’t stay because the pay is too low. I remember one saying that he loved it at Flixton but was lured away by better money.”

Flow of information

Paul is keen to continue to improve the flow of information between the greens team and the clubhouse. “I appreciate we need to do paperwork but members like to see us out on course doing our job. The more updates you can give them about what you do, the smoother the club runs.”

He’s one of a three-strong greens committee, which meets monthly for an overview of activities, planned projects and targets. “I’ve also launched a monthly members newsletter to send out and post on the clubhouse noticeboard.”

When the occasional tete-a-tete breaks out on course - machinery noise upsetting players focus for example - the solution is to work out what’s best for both sides, Paul believes. “Managing expectations is the name of game,” he says.

Electric avenues

Paul’s accent on green practices extends to his fleet. “Electric is the future, but I need to know machines will do the job before switching over and like to view all sides of the issue. We’ll be looking at electric hedgetrimmers and cutters and I’ll be attending local demo days at grounds nearby to see kit for myself. One thing’s for sure, we have to take 2-strokes off the shelf soon.”

Machinery wait times can be a worry for a club like Flixton, Paul adds. “Our new Kubota greens mower took an age to arrive. Greenkeepers I speak to are hanging on to their old stuff, so second-hand equipment and machinery is more difficult to get hold of.”



The greenkeeping sector needs to start considering how to attract more young people before it’s too late. When I’m thinking that I’m the last generation of greenkeepers, that’s scary. I cannot see an answer to the problem



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Spreading the word about sustainability is a key mission for beautiful St Annes Old Links in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. So too is maintaining its position as one of the nation's leading Open qualifying venues.

This 6,907-yard, Par 72 championship links ranks in Golf World's Top 100 Courses in England, and comes 9th in the North by National Club Golfer's league of North West courses.

The signature 9th hole, considered the top 9th in Great Britain and Ireland by Golf World, caused the great Bobby Jones to comment: "It's difficult to see how you could improve on this."

A course "to test the patience and resilience of budding professionals and enthusiastic beginners", Old Links holds a

fine heritage of staging Open qualifying rounds down the years, and continues to do so.

The commission of the 'Old links golf club, St Annes on the sea' was undertaken by golfer and renowned clubmaker George Lowe (reportedly the first person to play 18-hole Carnoustie) and a consortium of local business people in 1901, to establish an affordable golf venue on the North West seaboard.

The Old Links name was coined as the land had been occupied by the Lytham St Annes Golf Club, which had relocated two miles south (now Royal Lytham & St Annes) in 1897.

By 1909, the Old Links had secured tenancy of the land, prompting Lowe and Alex (Sandy) Herd to submit formal plans to the local council in 1911, formalising the

course layout on the land the club had secured.

St Annes Old Links Golf Club has been a mainstay of regional, county and national competition golf for decades but the last ten years have proved particularly busy. From hosting local final qualifying for The Open in July 2012, the club has gone on to host the Ladies Golf Union Girls Home International matches in 2013, followed swiftly by the English Women's Open Amateur Strokeplay Championship. Two years later, they hosted the R&A for the Boys Home Internationals and, two years after that, it held the UK Seniors Golf Association Northwest Championship.

Building further on its golfing prowess, Old Links became the first venue to host final qualifying for both the Open Championship and Ricoh Women's British

St Annes Old Links

Doubling up!

Greg Rhodes rambles through the rough on one of England's golf coast Top 100 links treasures to meet Course Manager **Greg Wellings** and his team who are already preparing for another hectic Open qualifying events season

Open in the same year - 2018.

The course continues to host final qualifying for The Open from 2019 to 2022, also staging final qualifying for the Senior Open in 2019.

"Now, for the third time, we are doubling up," course manager Greg Wellings reveals, "as the R&A has asked us to be a joint venue in hosting the Amateur Championship with Royal Lytham & St Annes next year to add to The Open final qualifying."

Busy, busy, busy then, but Greg remains calm and assured in the maelstrom of key-event course maintenance he and his colleagues have grown familiar with. Greg says it's arguably climate change and changing legislation that brings the greatest challenges. The flat Old Links landscape offers little if any shelter from the winds gusting off the Irish Sea, and the course is

really at the mercy of the elements.

"Last year was a weird one, weather-wise," he notes. "Prolonged dry weather from the south, no rain for long periods and not necessarily high temperatures, made for a battling year on the course. As we have no fairway irrigation, we've had all hands to the pump," [or tractor-hauled bowser to be specific] "also supplementing fine turf irrigation."

Despite the dearth of irrigation, water can prove an issue. "We have experienced some extremely wet winters in the last four or five years, which can push the water table quite high. The lowest point of the course, around the 16th green, has suffered with that."

"The club is undertaking an architectural review with renowned course architect Martin Ebert to remedy the problem. Of course, the knock-on effect of the wet

periods and reduced sunlight in winter can leave surfaces moist, putting the grass under pressure from disease and turf pests such as casting worms."

"Solutions to these issues are not easy," Greg continues, "but we feel that if you can achieve the right nutritional balance, along with sound cultural practice, your turf will be resilient."

Improvements identified for this winter include reinforcing old irrigation wells, as an underground attenuation chamber, each holding some 5,500 or more gallons, will provide a valuable resource to fairways in the difficult summer months. "We're under the cosh to complete this," Greg admits.

The four ponds on the course help drain the surface naturally but climate change demands more intervention work, Greg reveals. "The coming eighteen months will





Course closures are never an easy choice for clubs and Old Links escapes that fate most of the time



Course Manager Greg Wellings



10th Green and Clubhouse

see us installing swales to alleviate winter flooding, once the plans we're lodging are approved."

Just to state the obvious, swales allow water to run off greens into an area such as uncut rough, where it can drain away without interfering with course playability. "Such work is a tough challenge if resourcing is tight," admits Greg.

Course closures are never an easy choice for clubs and Old Links escapes that fate most of the time, but weather and the water table dictate. "We have to close occasionally," says Greg, "but usually fewer than 5-10 days annually."

Like more courses currently, Old Links offers fewer bunkers in modern times. Totalling 130, they still present hazards for the unwary golfer. "When I came into the post, we had 142, so we have around ten percent fewer than then. It's a matter of available resources to tend them all."

"Reducing the number cuts the burden of maintenance. We have around thirty bunkers to rebuild in this year's programme, so the process is resource heavy."

Future-proofing the course is a key priority

for Greg. "We apply 200 to 300 tonnes of sand a year to the whole facility but, like other clubs, we must look more keenly at alternative methods of acquiring sand, as society cannot keep plundering the quarries for ever. We have to strike the correct balance between environmental consistency and the play conditions on course.

Sand is applied for topdressing greens, tees and greens surrounds as well as maintaining correct sand depths in the bunkers. "Consideration of the number of bunkers in future - reducing them in other words - would help with the sand resource burden," Greg says.

"Despite being so close to St Annes beach, it is no ready source for sand. It's an SSSI designated area and a biological heritage site so we cannot look there for sand, although we are negotiating with the council for supplies."

"Currently, we are not permitted to take any. Discarded roadside sand could be an option but we would have to be extremely careful about contaminants, which could act more or less like a herbicide. We would have to work closely with the authorities for such



Apprentice Greenkeeper Ben Quinn will undertake his EPA in the coming weeks



Knapsack sprayers are used for weed control

a scheme to be suitable for us," Greg adds.

As one way of generating material to use on the course, the team runs their own composting programme, which includes boxed off clippings, cardboard and paper, and wood chip from course tree management.

"We include bunker digouts too," Greg explains, "as well as sand/turf turnover. The programme works to an 18-month cycle, which involves a 12-month process of

mechanically turning the compost several times with an excavator."

The programme creates up to 100 tonnes of material annually, which the team apply on course to develop turf rootzone, Greg adds. "It's all about 'what goes around comes around' - applying indigenous material whenever we can; and there's no need to sterilise it."

The cycle begins with the spring clippings regime, plus leftover wood chip and

cardboard, "and there's a huge injection of green waste generated from summer clippings and from harvesting rough."

Old Links is blessedly free of invasive species and vigilance is the name of the game, but maintaining a green regime can only take the team so far. Weed control is still necessary and herbicides - albeit strictly limited quantities - come into play.

"Boom spraying is out of bounds for us," says Greg, "as our team of four can cover 12-

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The Old Links team with a couple of new purchases

12.5 hectares over a week or two, using Cooper Pegler Evolution 15 knapsacks for spot spraying tees, carries, fairways, semi rough and greens surrounds. That way we can really reduce the quantity of chemicals we apply."

The back-end of summer is time for another knapsack spray; labour intensive but worth it on balance, says Greg. "This year, we've been hit by drydowns, which tipped the balance with weed growth, while grass was on the back foot."

R & A criteria

Old Links commands an enviable record as a qualifying course, but what criteria does the R&A stipulate to bring courses into the arena?

"The course has to be in its best possible natural condition," Greg emphasises, "with consistency of play throughout the period in question."

"Members have to be considered too, so year-round standards are always critically important. Fortunately, we are well supported by both members and the club - well resourced and a positive working environment."

"Our machinery fleet is modern and training allocation is generous, striking a balance between maintenance and off-course time."

The R&A provide ecological and agronomical support, visiting the course and benchmarking what they require during the events.

"Then there's the wet weather and health and safety protocols we have to follow," adds Greg.

Those protocols came sharply into focus in 2017, he recalls, "when we needed as many staff and members out on course helping out after a deluge had swamped the

greens. "We were squeegeeing them like it was going out of fashion, but we gained invaluable experience and later put secondary plans in place to ensure we would have the equipment and bodies ready to deal with any recurrence whilst hosting tournament play."

Healthy numbers

Greg runs an eight-strong full-time team round the year, with part-timer "labourers"

swelling resources between April and October, completing 20hr/wk shifts filling bunkers and replacing divots.

"Two of my greenkeepers have come through from completing apprenticeships," Greg notes, "and I find the process is an effective way for them to gain experience and skills from day one."

Given the status of Old Links, good behaviour is a given and the whole team (part-timers included) must appreciate the



Final Qualifying for the Open



Kit Gregory atop the Lastec Articulator

importance of it in maintaining cordial relationships with members and visiting golfers, Greg says.

"I'm on my third apprentice working with Phil Lomas, the tutor and assessor at Oldham College. The first, Kit Gregory, qualified last December with a distinction in the new level 2 qualification. He always had that potential to go all the way."

"He had stepped out of football coaching and I saw that he had so much potential to go forward. His work here has been

impressive and he's bringing a marked change to the course."

"Ben Quinn is sitting his Level 2 End Point Assessment (EPA), while Alfie Williams started with the club in January. He's worked with us on the seasonal work and embraced it well, thanks partly to a fantastic attitude."

The grant assistance (£3,000) available for taking on an apprentice before April helps smooth the training process, with Greg expecting the second tranche in January, after receiving the first up front.

What's in the shed?

Greens

John Deere 2550e hybrid triple mowers (diesel) x 2

John Deere 180SL petrol hand mowers x 5

John Deere HD 200 sprayer and John Deere diesel Pro Gator

Tees and surrounds

John Deere 2500e hybrid triple mowers (diesel) x 3

John Deere 220c petrol hand mower

Fairways

John Deere 7500A (diesel)

John Deere 6500e hybrid (diesel)

Toro 3100D Sidewinder (diesel)

Semi rough/rough cut

One Lastec 3300 articulator (diesel)

Rough management

Wiedenmann Super 500

Aeration and tractors/attachments

John Deere 5075e (diesel)

John Deere 4520 (diesel)

Toro Pro Core 648 (petrol)

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The skills can always be taught but, if you surround yourself with like-minded people, opportunities will present themselves

Greg's not standing still on team numbers and plans to boost the "squad".

"Ten full-timers would be a good place to be," he says.

Better welfare facilities are in the pipeline over the next two years. "Locker rooms, canteen, those kinds of things. For the last ten years, we've been adequate but I don't want to risk falling behind the times. Personal space post-Covid is important."

"Our workshop canteen is housed in a separate building next to the clubhouse, with the tractor facility nearby. I want to create the right environment for colleagues."

"On the ground it's critical that team members are willing to learn and embrace a project." Once that culture is embedded, Greg explains. "The skills can always be taught but, if you surround yourself with like-minded people, opportunities will present themselves."

Like tie-ups with local schools - "led by us, we can offer community outreach visit for a day to discover how we do things here and the environmental measures we are putting in place."

"The onus is on us to address an important issue such as our carbon footprint and for the wider community to understand



Our task, as custodians of the land, is to get the wider community to take ownership of the land and become invested in what we do here and to be aware that the course can exist in balance with the natural surroundings



View of the course during the Boys Home Internationals in 2017

we act responsibly and pursue sustainability."

Encroachment

The golf course as a haven for wildlife diversity is a stance more clubs are taking. Greg is aware of the potential perils of encroaching development and fears Old Links may become isolated.

"The course quality is fine," he says, "but surrounding us is more and more new housing. We already share a fence line with Blackpool Airport and I'm concerned about green space being eaten up around us."

Accordingly, the mission is to engage the membership and the local community more fully with what might become a scarce green resource locally. "Our task, as custodians of the land, is to get the wider community to take ownership of the land and become invested in what we do here, to see that we try to manage the course sustainably and to be aware that the course can exist in balance with the natural surroundings."

Right moves

Greg began greenkeeping in 2005, joining Stockport Golf Club as a rank and filer. "A nice place to work," he recalls. He completed his Level 2 and 3 there before

joining the crew at St Andrew's Old Course for seven months of seasonal work.

He moved south in the November to become first assistant at The Mere Golf & Country Club in Cheshire.

When a position at Old Links opened up at the start of 2012, Greg jumped at the chance. "A good move for me to an Open Championship final qualifying course." When the then course manager left his post, Greg took over the role.

Deputy course manager Christopher Jones is enjoying his second spell at Old Links, after moving from Southport and Ainsdale Golf Club in 2018.

After a stint at Wigan Rugby as head groundsman, David Davies joined the team early in 2019. "He'd had greenkeeping experience before his Wigan work," Greg explains.

An even more recent arrival is Christopher Hulme, landing in June 2020 after a seasonal stint at a Swedish golf club.

Then come the recent intake of apprentices - Kit, Ben and Alfie - all three moving across to full greenkeeping roles.

"Our links with apprentices have proved a revelation in the last three to four years," Greg enthuses. "A real step away from



Bob Bould doing some course remodelling

previous ones. If we have a legacy, I'd like it to be that of Old Links serving as a breeding ground for good greenkeepers." If the recent intake is any measure, the club is already well on its way.

And so to Bob Bould. A mere fifty years at Old Links and still going strong at seventy. "Bob and I are the two originals," Greg says cheerily.

"The club held a celebration evening for him recently," Greg reports, "and bought him an e-bike so he can whizz round the town when he's not in work."

Old Links' 'Mr Mechanic', Bob worked as a deputy to some big-hitting bosses in his time - Joe Gillett, Chris and Geoff Whittle and Stuart Hogg among them.

"He joined Old Links in 1971 and has seen eight or nine final qualifying rounds here as well as working as support staff at Royal Lytham at the Open Championship.

"Bob has an unbelievable skill set and has completed a huge amount of work with diggers, including shaping greens surrounds. That will form part of his legacy."

Organising and sharpening the £700,000 fleet of diesel, electric and hybrid turf machinery is one of Bob's tasks. "The main mowing fleet is on a 5-year lease and generally we don't keep anything longer than ten years."

"With such significant expectation surrounding the golf course, Bob has an invaluable role to play in keeping the fleet fully up to scratch. I find it hard to quantify

how much maintenance costs he's saved us over the years."

His organisational flair comes into its own during events, Greg adds. "Rather than checking a cutting unit when it's on a machine, we normally remove it and check that the cut's optimal. If it isn't, we can regrind or fit a new blade."

"We bench-set the greens mowers three times a week, fairways and tees mowers weekly during the season and, for hand mowers, it's three times a week too, then daily during tournaments. In any case, all the machines are seen to a week or two before events so Bob is kept a bit busy."

Robots are on Greg's mind currently amid talks about machinery emission levels. "I need to do the appropriate research into them but my question is: can they trim fairways overnight for us."

Greg's clearly an environmentally conscious manager who sees the bigger picture of where Old Links can fit more fully into community engagement, including internal communications with the clubhouse and members.

"I'm keen to start a blog as a way of letting everyone know what we are doing out on the course, together with using social media and videos, feeding back to the club's Facebook group, as well as putting up notices in the clubhouse."

No doubt that process will form part and parcel of the significant investment in the clubhouse and an overview of the entire



Focus on root development on greens

facility, timed with the arrival of a new secretary/manager.

Meanwhile, a clutch of Open qualifying tournaments beckons for the 2022 season, to further strengthen St Annes Old Links' status as a top-flight golfing venue.

You wouldn't bet against Bob being in the thick of it.

But let's return to that signature 173-yard 9th. "Danger lurks everywhere," declares Greg. "A 40-yard punch bowl green with skinny approach is the prospect, surrounded by sand dunes and four or five bunkers."

Doubtless golf's great and good will be tackling what is such a challenging hole in 2022 and beyond.

Bob's worth his weight in gold

Notching up 50 years in one work setting is impressive enough in any sector.

That Bob Bould has recorded such a massive milestone in greenkeeping is all the more staggering.

Perpetually early starts, northern exposure to winds blowing off the Irish Sea over St Annes Old Links, and the sheer physical grind of the job may have battered and bowed a less resilient spirit.

But Bob's built of girders. In fact, he's the kind of man mountain many a club would die for as the sector struggles to attract the true calibre of greenkeeper course managers are crying out for.

"I had a couple of jobs before joining Old Links in 1971," Bob recalls, "including working for a draught excluder manufacturer and on a farm in the workshop."

"I've always been a bit mechanically minded and used to tinker with motorbikes a bit." So the ground was laid.

Joining as one of the groundstaff, Bob "worked his way up", becoming deputy for a short time in the early 2000s. "But I didn't really fancy it and when I was offered the job of maintaining the machinery, I took it."

Course manager Greg Wellings says the

money Bob has saved the club in maintenance costs is incalculable. "It must be a hell of a lot though", he says.

Bob continues: "We do all the grinding in-house, although machines go back to the suppliers for the diagnostics stuff."

Any favourite machines over the years? "Well the triple greens mowers, I suppose," he says.

Old Links recognised Bob's record of service earlier this year and clubbed together to buy him an electric bike "but I'm still waiting for it", Bob says.

"It's being made to order and the manufacturer is probably having delays getting parts."

Bob's certainly seen a few celebrities challenge the Old Links holes, while appearing in shows at nearby Blackpool. "Val Doonican, Eric Sykes and Tommy Cannon all played here I remember. I'm not an autograph hunter myself but a previous boss got singer Johnny [Moon River] Mathis's for his wife."

Has Bob a retirement plan in mind? "Not at the moment," he states. "I'll have to retire at some stage but I'm taking it one day at a time."

Happy 50th anniversary Bob and long may you continue.



1971 – a year to remember

The year Bob came to Old Links was one the nation will never forget for several key events in Britain's history. Here are some of them:

- Britain introduces decimal currency
- Education Minister Margaret Thatcher abolishes free milk for schoolchildren amid calls of 'Maggie Thatcher, milk snatcher' by public protestors.
- Government publishes its terms of entry into the European Economic Community (EEC)



Marylebone Cricket Club

The Lord's way being done

For Pitchcare's ton-up issue, Neville Johnson visited a place where centuries are given special recognition. A chat with Head Groundsman **Karl McDermott** at the Home of Cricket in London's St John's Wood reveals why, for him, there is simply nowhere else to go as a cricket groundsman

When you work for the club which laid down the Laws of Cricket over two hundred years ago, it will quite likely take your professional pride up a notch or two. You sense that the moment you start talking to Karl McDermott, who has now been in charge at Lord's for three years. He says that every single day he still finds it hard to believe he achieved his lofty ambition to look after its pitches.

Pitchcare: In your wildest of dreams at Dublin's Clontarf Cricket Ground all those years ago, you couldn't have imagined you'd one day be running things at Lord's? How's it been? What have been the standouts?

Karl McDermott: When I took over from Mick Hunt, I had a month here alongside him and I bombarded him with questions at a time when he was winding down for a much-deserved retirement. He was a font of knowledge and it was a privilege to tap into it. He was a difficult act to follow. I always looked up to him, as did pretty well every pro groundsman, and I'd got his job. Still can't believe it.

Being at Lord's does put you in a spotlight like nowhere else. I remember when I was at the Ageas there was added pressure of a kind for international matches, but really they were just another game. Here, it's a different level. Attention and interest in the big games - and there are more of them of course - is so much higher, from the media, players, spectators, not to mention MCC, my employer.

I don't deny it, I really enjoy the pressure. The 2019 Ashes game here took me where I'd never been before. The build-up began

days, even weeks beforehand, and it got more and more ramped up in the press and social media. Wonderful excitement.

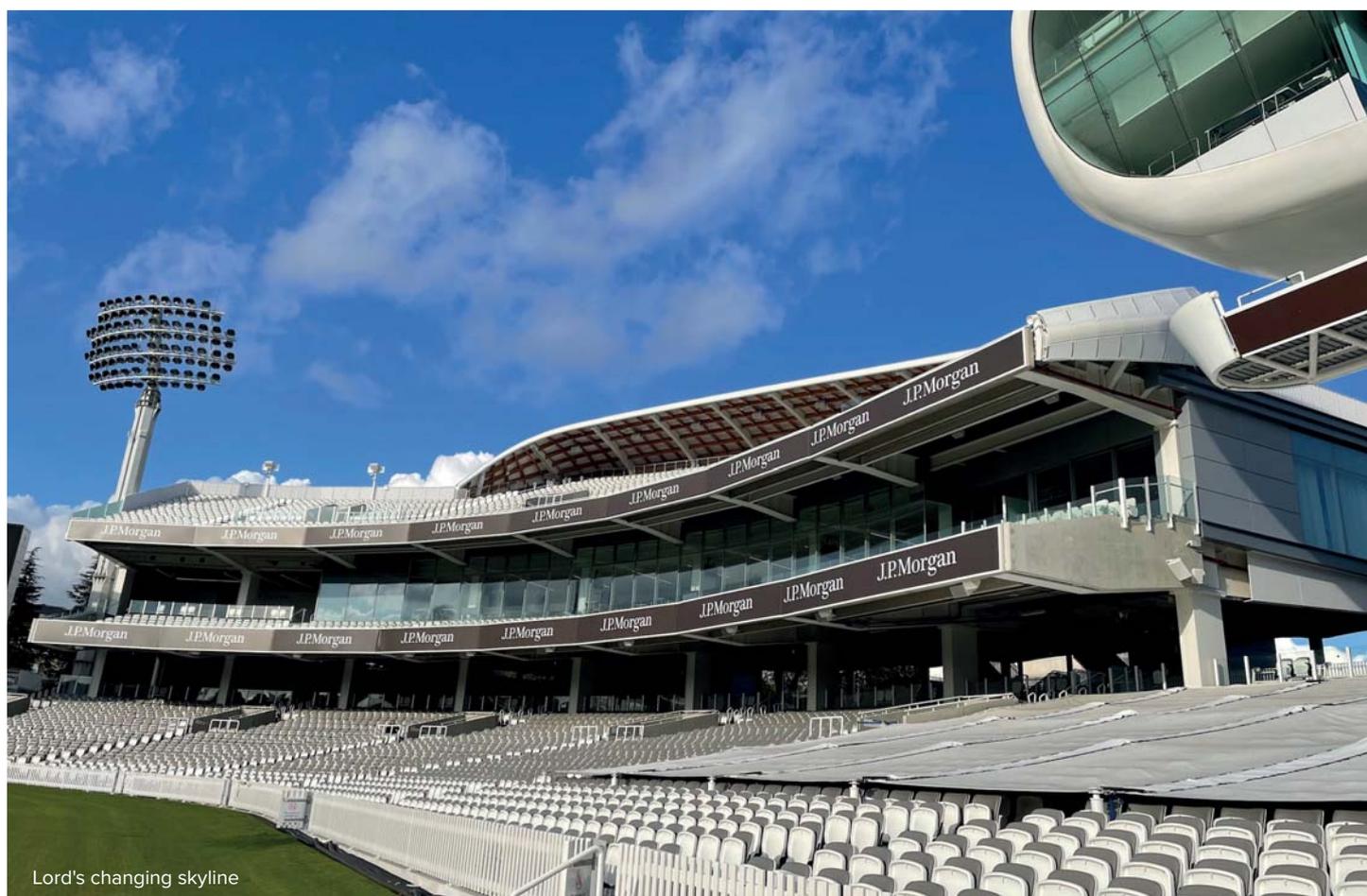
That game, and the World Cup final, have been stand-outs in the short time I've been here, oh and of course the first England v Ireland Test. I do try to enjoy the big games but you don't get much time to take them in because the next game is always just around the corner.

Is there a new level of responsibility on your shoulders, not just because of the hallowed playing surface, but the global gaze there is on all things Lord's?

But for the added tension and expectation surrounding big games, I can honestly say I feel the same about every pitch I prepare here. I get just as concerned and involved about pitch performance on the third day of a Middlesex county game.

The first ball of every Lord's game is a focus of attention for me. I need to see that my surface is going to be a fair and lasting one for bat and ball. I reckon ball one tells you if you've achieved that. That inner relief is worth all the hard preparation work.

Every match at Lord's is an event for somebody. In the minor matches here, for plenty of cricketers it will be the only chance



Lord's changing skyline



Being groundsman at Lord's does make you a bit more conscious about what you do and say. My cheeky Irish temperament has been throttled back, some might say

they get to play at the Home of Cricket - a special day - and I love the responsibility of doing my best to make it so. The Village Cup final at the end of the season is probably one of my favourite days. I like to think that's because I was a clubman once.

Being groundsman at Lord's does make you a bit more conscious about what you do and say. My cheeky Irish temperament has been throttled back, some might say.

Part of the responsibility of this particular job is to fly the flag for the profession of cricket groundsmanship. I will always do what I can to make sure the gates are open to any pro or aspiring youngster to see what we do here. I am so keen to see that our work here is as transparent as it can be. Our problems are no different to cricket grounds at all levels. We are just fortunate to have resources at our disposal.

The two-day Test in India last winter brought into sharp focus the vexed topic of conditions favouring the home side rather than the tourists. What is your take on this?

I won't be drawn on whether conditions and



Karl on the hallowed turf

the pitch led to that very short Test in India. The aim here is always, always to produce a good, fair cricket pitch.

English conditions do produce exciting cricket with plenty of fluctuations in fortune, but I also like Australian conditions with plenty of pace and bounce. This goes back to my time spent working down under for Sydney club Mossman. I'm looking forward to this winter's Ashes series, but I admit my interest is going to be more focused on the pitches than the fortunes of England. There, a little bit of the cheeky Irishman coming through!

Are you concerned about the number youngsters who are given the opportunity to see cricket groundsmanship as an exciting career?

As a youngster, when I first came into cricket groundwork it sparked a lifelong passion, which I still have 100 percent. Ask my wife, she'll tell you I'm constantly thinking - and talking - about cricket. Every day I wonder how I can improve what I do, how can I produce better pitches. It never leaves my mind and drives me on.

The way we can make sure the new generation of cricket groundsmen have that passion is to see that they're included hands-on, either in work experience or plain and simple helping out. Make sure they get the whole experience. See how everything is done and why. The onus is on all of us established groundsmen, right down to club level to do the encouraging.

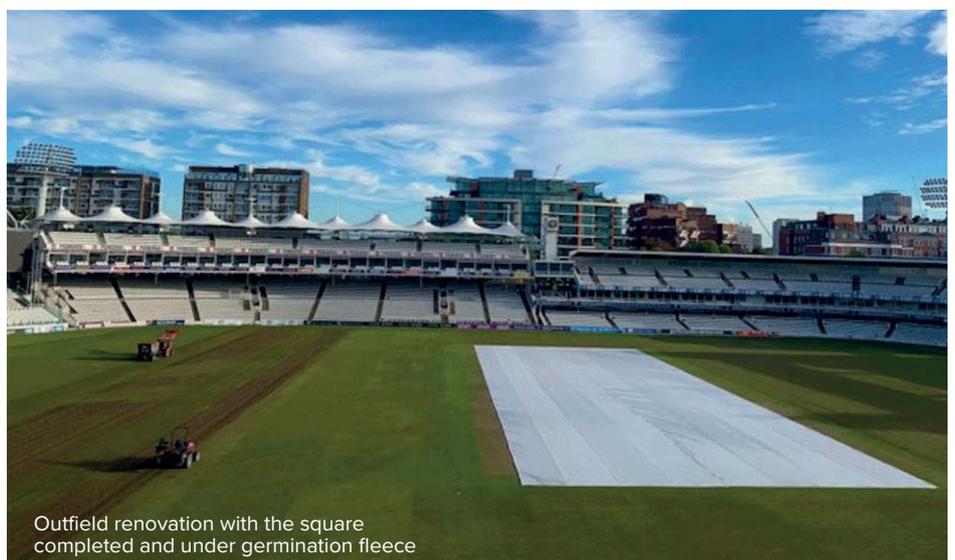
You can't let them jump on the roller or mow the square straight away, but you can find a pathway to let them gain experience and hopefully a passion. Avoid boredom setting in giving them only the 'shovelling cuttings into a trailer' jobs.

Actually, I've recently returned from Saltex where I backed the effort to bring youth into the industry.

I try to make sure everyone on the Lord's team is involved in everything we do. No exclusions. Our team is five full-timers, including myself, plus two or three more for the summer months. They are all seasoned pros, and they know full well what we've all come to realise is 'the Lord's way'. In simple terms, this means ensuring that every single



You can't let them jump on the roller or mow the square straight away, but you can find a pathway to let them gain experience and hopefully a passion. Avoid boredom setting in giving them only the 'shovelling cuttings into a trailer' jobs



Outfield renovation with the square completed and under germination fleece



Fineturf scarifying the square at the beginning of October



When there's a Test or other big match on, I do watch of course I do, even if it's just on the TV in my office. But it's the pitch I'm watching. That's my Lord's way

visitor to Lord's gets the wow factor.

Attention to detail, like seeing that edges are always neatly clipped, as are the irrigation heads surrounds, is the key. We showed our colleagues from Wembley Stadium around the ground a while back and a couple of them audibly exclaimed 'wow' as they passed under the Media Centre into the Main Ground. It made the hairs on my neck stand on-end, I'm not

embarrassed to admit. That's the effect of the Lord's way and we do what we can every single day to uphold it.

The long hours, the weather: things do test your resolve, but I know we've got a Lord's way team through and through.

When there's a Test or other big match on, I do watch of course I do, even if it's just on the TV in my office. But it's the pitch I'm watching. That's my Lord's way.

What are your wished-for technological developments for equipment and materials? What's going to help you do an even better job?

Machinery is getting better and better and the developments coming along more regularly, there's no doubt about that. MCC are always very supportive when there's something available that will help us do the job better. It goes hand in hand with wanting

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What we're getting for this winter is not on the same scale as for football grounds, but will be effective for three pitch sections of the square. SGL has constructed a bespoke single-run design for us, akin to those used at Wimbledon



Karl in front of the Lord's honours board

to be the best cricket ground in the world.

There's a responsibility here to lead in other ways, like pitch development or the technology that goes with it. We recently bought a lighting rig, for instance. It's commonplace for winter games, but still pretty new in cricket. We have shade issues at times of the year at Lord's and it's become an issue that needs dealing with as the season is getting longer.

A good half of the ground - the Pavilion end - is in shade during the winter. We've had on trial units from Manchester United's Old Trafford Stadium and they made quite a difference. What we're getting for this winter is not on the same scale as for football grounds, but will be effective for three pitch sections of the square. SGL has constructed a bespoke single-run design for us, akin to those used at Wimbledon.

I'm very excited about its impending arrival in mid-December. A Christmas present, if you like. A first bespoke lighting rig for cricket and Lord's is leading the way.

The Bob Willis Trophy Final finished on 1st October so your end of season renovation work had to wait. How did it go?

The match schedule is so tight now there has to be a lengthening of the season. This and the receding warmth and daylight has an effect on end of season refurbishment. We're having to think more flexibly about it.

This year our usual outsource contractor, Fineturf, conducted a full scarification of the square, but did not Koro. This left an amount of grass for the subsequent dressing to marry into. This has worked out very well and gave us the

strong likelihood of being able to verti-drain before Christmas, unlike last year when the weather and consequent tacky post-Koro surface conspired to delay this.

Repair work has changed so much. When I was starting out, we used a pedestrian scarifier and you'd be scared of taking anything out and wanting to leave as much grass as possible. You'd be scared of walking on the square in winter. Nowadays, we run tractors all over it.

Cricket pushing its boundaries. What's your take on plastic in pitch surfaces and The Hundred razzmatazz?

Hybrid pitches in cricket is in its infancy and Lord's is on the front row of the grid you might say for looking into their viability. The first was trialed here about three years ago on the main square. Since then, manufacturer SIS has provided us with two more and another for the Nursery Ground square.

They are similar in principle to football's Desso surface and have the same attributes. These strips have just a five percent plastic content and grass is still overwhelmingly the determining factor for performance.

Two of the three hybrids on our main square are used for professional cricket, notably and most recently for London Spirit home games in The Hundred tournament played here in August, though a natural surface was used for the final.

Early stages are quite positive. It doesn't make a bad surface good, but what it's given us is less wear and tear in the final delivery stride areas. It means strips can be used for second and third games in shorter limited over tournaments. Their future looks



Outfield re-instatement after completed extension of Compton and Edrich stands last March



Just 13 days after renovation work excellent germination has been achieved



From our point of view The Hundred is very much tournament pressure - more intense than T20 Blast games. Our work is high paced with plenty of on-pitch practice sessions to cater for as well. Hybrids do ease things somewhat

quite promising.

From our point of view, The Hundred is very much tournament pressure - more intense than T20 Blast games. Our work is high paced with plenty of on-pitch practice sessions to cater for as well. Hybrids do ease things somewhat.

What do you do to try and get away from cricket?

Our two-year-old daughter Aoife is taking up a lot of what little spare time I have. A lot of family time is lost over the summer and I do what I can to

catch up over winter. Right after Saltex, the three of us went for couple of weeks seeing friends and generally chilling out near Broadstairs in Kent.

Rugby is an out of season passion of mine and I try to get to at least one of the Six Nations games if I can. I love horseracing too and, like a true Irishmen, I can't resist time at Cheltenham.

You said you had a liking for Aussie cricket conditions. Do you know any of your counterparts down under?

I met Damien Hough, Head



Last strip of the season for the Bob Willis Trophy Final

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Karl in front of a statue of W.G. Grace

Curator at the Adelaide Oval when he was over here for the Ashes in 2019. We struck up a friendship and kind of made a promise to strengthen ties between the two great venues.

A workforce exchange is a very practical and worthwhile exercise we have under way. One of my guys, Josh Finch, did a spell at the Adelaide Oval last year and got enormous benefit from the experience. We're hoping we can welcome one of Damien's team here next summer.

Aside from big cricketing days, what tells you Lord's is special?

My favourite time here is when I'm on my own on a weekend or early in the morning, and I'm just sitting on the roller as the sun rises over the Edrich stand and glistens on the Pavilion. That is a sight to behold. That's what tells me I'll never tire of being here. It's a unique place, certainly in the world of cricket.

A century for Pitchcare. Any decent strokes?



Well done, Pitchcare. Plenty of applause from the industry for your ton. From the moment you got started, you've had the best interests of everyone in turfcare at heart. Personally, I've loved being part of it now and again and grateful for the help it's given me in my career

Well done, Pitchcare. Plenty of applause from the industry for your ton. From the moment you got started, you've had the best interests of everyone in turfcare at heart. Personally, I've loved being part of it now and again and grateful for the help it's given me in my career.

Oh, and I love the attention to detail - very much like the Lord's way - especially What's in the Shed. I love to see what fellow groundsmen use to deal with things. We are a broad church and Pitchcare's serves us all very well.

Where to next?

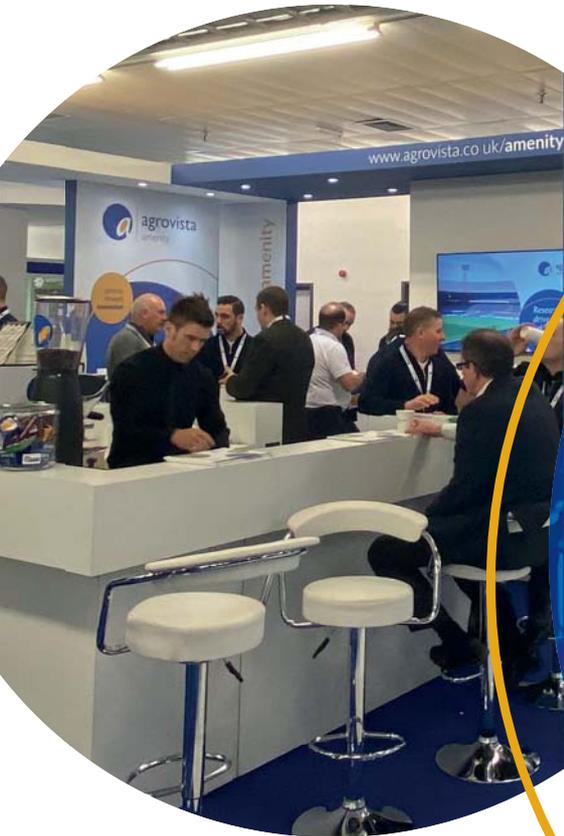
I was asked that by MCC when they interviewed me for the job. There is nowhere to go after Lord's was my answer then, and still is.

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Leicester City FC training centre

The industry has to change

When Leicester City Football Club launched its Sports Turf Academy (STA) in July 2021, the aim was clear; to be world leaders in the training and education of the current and next generation of sports turf groundstaff, whilst applying that learning to active working environments. Kerry Haywood visited Head of Sports Turf and Grounds **John Ledwidge** to find out more and take a look around the world-class training centre



The small details and thought process that has gone into planning the Seagrave site is quite something and is based on aspirational roots. John commented: "We took our inspiration from other clubs who have done this really well, such as Spurs. The construction of the pitches is no different as players progress; they start on fully constructed natural pitches, through to Fibresand pitches for the Academy and then stitched construction for the first team."

Talent, as young as seven, start at the foot of the 'T' and progress through the pitches until they work their way around to the top of the site where the professionals train. The same aspirations apply to senior teams and the long entrance driveway; they go left at



the end for the Academy and right for the first team, so again the aspiration is to be able to turn right and make that topflight. Players also progress through the main building from left to right.

Planning and construction

“The Club began the planning process around three years ago, with a vision to create a state-of-the-art elite training centre and I was fortunate to sit on the Project Board from inception to completion. The club’s first team’s first training session took place on the 24th December 2020, so we have now been operational for a year. We took possession of the site with a caveat that certain areas still needed to be fulfilled and that work is still underway on some of the landscaping areas.”

To put the new site into perspective, it is 7.5 times larger than the old Belvoir Drive training ground at 24 acres (which is now used as the professional women’s facility). The 185-acre complex has 21 playing surfaces which includes 14 full size natural pitches and 2.5 synthetic - one indoors in the King Power Centre - and two show pitches for use in selected matches by the club’s Development Squad and Academy.

When construction commenced, there was a cut and fill operation across the whole site to ascertain the levels for the various pitches and buildings. “All the pitches were lime stabilised to ensure they were stable enough to build on, and then we built up and constructed the pitches from there. There are four first team pitches that incorporate a Grassmax system; we used

a polyethylene fibre, after our research suggested better longevity and structural integrity over the course of ten years.”

“The entire site has a connected drainage system, which goes into large and well-constructed attenuation ponds across the site, but at the moment, we can’t re-claim the water to reuse it. The design phase moved so fast originally that we hadn’t factored it in so, to consider it retrospectively would have pushed the completion date back which had its own potential consequences, but this work is now included in the five year plan and a bid to drive the club’s sustainability strategy forward.”

“Since being operational on the new site, one of the biggest changes we’ve had to adapt to is the sheer amount of use. The Academy now has access to a lot

Match pitches. Despite not having many games, or uses on the match pitches this month, the guys have maintained presentation levels. Match pitch two has struggled with how thick it is and work is ongoing to thin it out periodically. The use of the Uniscratch has been trialed, which did take out a good amount of material, but we feel a harder scarification is required



To give some perspective, the horticultural aspect of the new site is actually bigger than the entire old training ground which means the ten gardeners have their work cut out

more pitches and they, rightly so, have an expectation train and play a lot more of their time on natural grass, so with that, comes a bigger schedule and we've had to adapt our approach. For example we now irrigate for under 11s training to keep the ball moving at an expected speed (which was relatively unheard of before) and we now make our staff available on evenings and weekends to water if required and move goals etc. It also allows us to have a presence on site so that we can manage and rotate the usage, without dictating to them - as that isn't conducive to a good working relationship. We've built a pro-active relationship with all of our age groups - first team included - where there is a level of respect for what we do, but we also work with the respect that we are here to facilitate all the teams. My days of being a grumpy and obstructive

groundsman are over - but there were quite a few years I lived up to that."

"All the departments (along with players) realise how lucky they are to be in an environment like this. It will not only help to retain professional players, but also appeal to young talent coming through the ranks, who hopefully won't want to go elsewhere. Those young players won't be on 3G pitches as much, given the main ambition here was to increase grass usage. At Belvoir Drive, that was around 25% grass usage based on the data we collected (predominantly because we couldn't rotate pitches and didn't have the space) whereas now, it is up to 75%."

Teams

The teams consist of eighteen grounds staff, a team of ten landscapers who take care of



The driveway has had its first thin using the Profi-Hopper. These images show the South Side lawns, although walking and driving by they did look nice, we had to do a secondary treatment for red thread using Inter-Tebloxy



I got into this industry because I loved the idea of the job and the money was almost irrelevant, however, twenty years down the line, times have changed

everything outside of pitches, four workshop technicians, plus four greenkeepers. John continued: "The management structure and delegation is so important. I oversee the Training Ground, Belvoir Drive, The King Power Stadium and the Sports Turf Academy and Callum Allsop, Senior Sportsturf and Grounds Manager manages everything at the Training Ground. There are then four direct reports from the landscape manager, golf course manager, workshop

manager and the pitch manager who look after everything logistically. They all ensure each department has enough people in every day, make sure the products are here to implement the maintenance and fertiliser programmes, everything to do with HR etc., which is a colossal job."

"The set up here is great for variation and development in the teams. We can, on occasion, interchange between roles; we can have the greenkeepers working

on pitches and groundstaff out on the golf course. It's a USP of the site that staff can come and not only do sports turf, but greenkeeping, mechanics and horticulture too. To give some perspective, the horticultural aspect of the new site is actually bigger than the entire old training ground and they are also responsible for all the ecology on site which means the ten gardeners have their work cut out."

John is the licence holder for Natural



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Colour and coverage are both very good on the first team pitches. The pitch density is slightly high so some verti-cutting has taken place this month in periods with a couple of days break. Pitches are now being cut down at 23mm consistently and will remain at this height through the season.

STA - The four pillars

The **Training & Education** pillar includes specialist provision of sports turf educational packages, ranging from short-courses to apprenticeships to degree-level internships. The Academy will seek to add value to all those in sports turf education by utilising a blended learning experience of practical, online and classroom-based teaching. Furthermore, the Academy will look to support the sports turf voluntary sector with their training needs too.

Through the **Technical Services** pillar, improvements will be made to grassroots football pitches. With grassroots football set to receive almost £550m of Government funding over the coming years to make playing surfaces safer, the STA will set a new standard in pitch improvement and offer tailored advice to grassroots clubs to maximise the potential of their funds.

Tournament support will come in the form of highly skilled seasonal staff the STA will make available to venues hosting turf-based sporting events. As well as ensuring venues meet and exceed exacting standards set by governing bodies, the programme is aimed at enabling professional development and the cross-sport sharing of best practice.

The STA's fourth pillar of **Trials and Research** will focus on the innovation and emerging technologies entering the sports turf industry. A key area for investigation is the relationship between turf management and player performance. The unique position of the Academy offers a world class prospect - placing cutting edge sports turf research into 'live' in situ trials - a first for elite sport played on grass.

England, but together with the garden landscape manager, the team have to monitor and enhance the habitats and ponds. "We are currently de-silting all the attenuation ponds and we have two ecologists here to check each bucket load to ensure there are no newts or species being dislodged and ensure that it all complies with Natural England regulations."

The golf course is surrounded by 12-acres of woodland under a strict woodland management plan. "We have a 5km perimeter fence around the site, however, we have gates and openings where badgers and wildlife could enter, but we have been quite lucky not to have suffered any significant damage to date. In addition, and in line with the Land Ecology and Management Plan, we have a responsibility to encourage wildlife and biodiversity, so the aim is to introduce sheep to graze on the par 3 which, in turn, will help the wildflower meadows. That side of things, isn't just a token gesture; we take it really seriously and the team all take an active interest in learning about everything."

The Academy journey

"A massive part of the journey has been that we can bend and flex and that we can continually adapt. We went through a learning curve of testing ideas and changing certain things if required. It's now the beauty of where we are, that we continue to adapt and pioneer our business plan. We built this facility for the industry, but we are open to ideas of how we can introduce or change

things to make it work for everyone and how we can do something good for the industry. I'm fortunate that the club back me and back what we are trying to achieve."

"Ultimately, I still have budgets and targets to achieve each month and that comes from a revenue stream of the four pillars (see side bar). Anything we generate is reinvested, but there are some benefits of the facility that can't be quantified. We recently held an event where people from fifty grassroots clubs, who we had engaged with over the past eighteen months, came in for a seminar and a look around the site and machinery, and that means so much to those local clubs and their learning."

Machinery

As John shows me around the site, the amount of green machinery is obvious as the club have just signed a 32-fleet agreement with John Deere (supported by Farol Ltd). "Knowing that we needed to make a very significant investment in new equipment, we went through a very robust, rigorous and transparent tender process," says John. "We invited all the key players to demonstrate their latest, greatest and best machines, and the whole process ended up taking almost a year to complete - it was extremely thorough."

Machinery includes two new environmentally friendly GPS Precision Sprayers, 8000E and 2750E hybrid electric ride-on cylinder mowers, 7700A PrecisionCut cylinder and 7400A TerrainCut rotary ride-on mowers with TechControl



I strongly believe that part of the issue with attracting new people into the industry is that there is no standardisation for salaries etc. It shouldn't matter whether you are joining Accrington Stanley or a Premier League club



Full-time Academy pitches. The colour of the pitches improved through the month, once pitches started to be mown consistently and regular mowing with the JD8000 means cutting is more frequent. An application of Sportsmaster 11-0-0, towards the middle of the month, saw great results with colour pick up

display, a 1600T wide-area rotary mower, X950R rear-collect lawn tractor and Z997R zero-turn rotaries, 2036R and 3038R compacts, and TE electric and XUV 855 plus 855 S4 Gators.

Golf course

Constructed on an 18-hole golf course, the site has been developed through its centre for football, leaving nine holes split into two wings. Golfers play the first four holes on the east wing and then travel 1.6km on a buggy to the fifth tee and the remaining holes on the west wing. It is currently only played by the first team, coaching staff and directors, but John commented that might change over time. “Regardless of how many rounds are played on the course, the expectation of players is that they want to walk off a pristine pitch and play on the same

manicured surface, which is a challenge given the indigenous soil. We have identified certain areas for improvement so, this winter, we are starting a tee development programme. This will set the standard for how they all should look, to then secure investment for all the other tees as part of the five-year development plan.”

John is looking at trialling robotic mowers on the fairways. “The issue we have is that the course is very wet as it has the original indigenous clay profile and, although we have invested significantly in the course to improve the greens and tees through improved drainage and irrigation, the fairways remain a problem. We currently mow twice a week, but if a robot could cut every day and then we went out and striped them that would be fantastic, and it makes economic sense.”



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salaries and a clear progression path. It shouldn't matter whether you are joining a league two team or a Premier League club. I feel, potentially controversial, an industry union "type" of structure might be a way of enforcing set pay scales, so that someone with a Level 2 qualification gets a minimum of 'X' and they know exactly what the pay increments are as they progress through their career, skillset and qualifications. With a collective voice, clubs are more likely to listen and members know they will get comfort in union representation, legal support, mental health support etc. It wouldn't be a threatening union, but something like this is arguably the only way we will drive change. I got into this industry because I loved the idea of the job and the money was almost irrelevant, however, twenty years down the line, times have changed and youngsters want to know how they can make their money."

"As a grounds department, we are beginning to look at the way we view



We built this facility for the industry, but we are open to ideas of how we can introduce or change things to make it work for everyone and how we can do something good for the industry

Our industry

"This facility (the STA) comes from a really good place and it isn't just for show. I have been in the industry for twenty years now (I'm thirty-six this year) and I'm proud that I have worked my way through the ranks; I've been an admin guy, been in League One, faced huge budget cuts been labelled the pattern guy and I have been on the young board of the GMA etc. I have been at both ends of the spectrum and, for me, this project is about giving something back. Ultimately, myself and other "high profile" guys are fortunate to have an amazing platform we can use to benefit the industry."

"I strongly believe that part of the issue with attracting new people into the industry is that there is no standardisation for





Drainage works have been completed to and seeded with a mixed fescue blend to contrast with the natural grass species across the course.



success. Over the past twenty years, success for me has resulted in sacrifice after sacrifice and, up until recently, I believed that is what everyone should be prepared to do. However, recently I lost one of my apprentices after ten months on her course, she had so much potential to benefit the industry. When I asked why she was leaving the industry, she told me that she wanted to be in the same position as me one day, but she was very aware of the sacrifices I have had to make and she didn't feel she could do it! She wanted a work-life balance and that isn't something she could achieve without sacrifice."

"We have to learn from this and have a benchmark which ensures that staff have a balance, have the support they require and get everything they need to make this an attractive career. You will always get individuals who want to go the extra mile and, in all honesty, they are probably the ones who will progress further quicker, but it shouldn't be a condition for success."





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There is a level of respect for what we do, but we also work with the respect that we are here to facilitate all the teams. My days of being a grumpy and obstructive groundsman are over

“I can’t describe the amount of sacrifice my wife Sammi has endured for me to be able to do this job and I am really grateful for all her support. We’ve been together for ten years and have two children and I have been absent for a lot of their upbringing. I made it a personal target that I should just take my annual leave this year and there is definitely more of a balance already.”

“It feels like we are staring down the barrel of a gun and, at some point, the trigger will be pulled and there will be no one coming through the industry to replace those leaving or retiring. I’m pulling all the pieces together and I’m hoping to get more clubs and/or associations on board to drive change!”

Research

“We are currently doing a lot of work and trials within our own on-site sports science laboratory where we are looking at the playability of the pitches and how what we do affects that.”

“The laboratory boasts cutting-edge research facility and has the flexibility and capacity to conduct a number of impactful research projects that we hope will better inform the industry with best practice. It is also so handy when it comes to our own surfaces and any issues we may have; we can take a sample, put it under the microscope, identify it and be treating it - all within half an hour.”

“One of the big areas we are currently working on is fertiliser inputs and whether we can reduce those levels to rely more on biostimulants, but still maintain the same quality. We have a 1000m² fully constructed USGA spec trial plot on site, which is fully irrigated and drained and includes many different species of grasses. It is ideal for whatever research we need to do, both internally and independently, and we are currently working towards Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) and Good Experimental Practice (GEP) accreditation.”



Sports science laboratory





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Fulham Football Club

Spinning plates!

Working at Fulham FC's Motspur Park training ground is like spinning plates reckons Head Groundsman **Declan Robinson**. It's an analogy he is happy with though, having learned from some of the top groundsman in the industry. Blair Ferguson chatted with him about his career path and ambitions



It was quite nerve-racking, and it sounds like a small thing now, but you're thinking you don't want to leave any blemishes, and you want to make sure it's straight, the last thing you want is anything to be highlighted on television



Careers are often shaped by the people you work with and the standout experiences you have along the way. Positive or negative, they mould a person as they progress and determine the staff member or manager they will become in the future.

Fulham Football Club's new Head Groundsman at Motspur Park, Declan Robinson, has spent twelve years working with some of the industry's best including Steve Braddock. He got an early introduction to pressure cutting courts at 19-years old at Wimbledon and got his new role with a job interview panel that included former Fulham manager, Scott Parker.

Like so many, his experiences have made an impression on him, and the early indications of his time at Fulham suggest he has been shaped for the better. In

groundsmanship, the happiness and workmanship of a team is usually reflected in the pitches they maintain, and taking that as a barometer, Declan has hit the ground running in his first six months.

Fulham's somewhat unassuming training base sits within the houses and schools of Surrey, with its two main buildings retaining their 1920s exteriors. Once owned by the University of London, Fulham took over the land in 1999 and, whilst much work has been done to accommodate a modern professional football club, the arena stand, which featured in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, embodies the character and history of the site.

As well as the arena pitch, there are four other natural pitches and outdoor and indoor synthetic pitches. These surfaces play host to Fulham's first team, academy, women's team, and the Fulham Foundation,

meaning they are in use most of the week.

When joining in April 2021, Declan's priority was to turn the pitches around to the condition they are in now with his hardworking team of seven, but his journey to this point has prepared him for life in charge, starting at Wimbledon.

"My first job was part of my Level 3 National Diploma at Myerscough, which was seasonal work at Wimbledon," Declan begins. "It was part of the course that you undertook some work experience. I got selected out of the class to go to Wimbledon along with two other lads, and I was there for six months. I was never interested in tennis before that, but it was an amazing place to work."

"My skills were limited because I had just come out of college, but I was fortunate to be handed the opportunity to cut my own courts, which is quite a prestigious thing. We



I'll never forget that practical day because he had thought of everything. You had to clean a bit of a sand bay, and he'd hide around the corner and watch you and make sure you didn't do a little thing like get your phone out

had a lot of people, who had come from abroad, who had years and years of experience in greenkeeping, and they did trials to see who was good at cutting. So, I think I oversaw courts ten and seven, and they were my responsibility. I learnt how to work under pressure, I learnt how to cut straight, and just the basics of working in groundsmanship. As I say, it was more of an experience to show me what can be in the future."

"It was quite nerve-racking, and it sounds like a small thing now, but you're thinking you don't want to leave any blemishes, and you want to make sure it's straight, the last thing you want is anything to be highlighted on television. I know it's not Centre Court, but there are still thousands of people a day watching it, and you can get any game on television, so it was one of those things that you just wanted to make sure you don't make a mistake; to start, it was nerve-racking, but I loved it."

After moving back to Lancaster following



The Players Building

his six-month stint in London, Declan applied for a job with the advert stating a 'North London Football Club'. During this interview process, he first met Steve Braddock and was introduced to one of the industry's favourite characters, his methods, and six and a half years of learning.

"I went to Arsenal's training ground and had an interview with Steve, which was rather interesting. Everyone knows Steve. He's very thorough, and for someone that didn't really know the industry, to go and sit in a room with him and understand how passionate he is and the measures that he goes to, it was an eye-opener."

"I had an interview and then a second interview/practical. I'll never forget that practical day because he had thought of everything. You had to clean a bit of a sand bay, and he'd hide around the corner and watch you and make sure you didn't do a little thing like get your phone out. Just little things like that, where he went to every extreme that he could to make sure you

were the right person - it was brilliant."

"I look back, and I was 19 and not that mature, so I didn't really understand all of the extremes, but now it's amazing to think about. There was another point where he did a memory test, and he would give me a piece of paper, take it back, and I had to memorise the delivery that was coming at the end of the day. I look back at my time and think it is such a great insight into the roles I've taken to this point in my career."

"I worked at Arsenal for a total of nine years, and I learnt everything there. Under Steve, I learnt groundsmanship from the basics to the top level because we did our own renovations, and everything we did was to the book, or to Steve's book because he has his own bible of groundsmanship. But I learnt everything that I needed to know for me to progress, by the time I'd worked for six years and completed yearly renovations and consistent high levels of pitch maintenance, I'd got myself to a skilled groundsman position, in my own head, but



Looking across to the indoor pitch building



Arena Stand Used in Chariots of Fire

there wasn't a position available."

After an unsuccessful search of the job market, Declan, along with his partner Lorna, took the bold decision to go travelling around the world. Declan's passion for groundsmanship meant his time away included visiting some of the world's iconic stadia, including the Maracanã in Brazil, Peru's national stadium in Lima and the homes of LA Galaxy and the LA Rams.

On his return from a year away, he went back to Wimbledon for seasonal work but soon took the opportunity to join Boreham Wood F.C. as Head Groundsman, where his learning started all over again.

"I applied for a job to be the Head Groundsman at Boreham Wood, which was under the jurisdiction of Arsenal because it's where the women and under 23 matches took place. I oversaw the Desso Grassmaster being installed and took sole charge of that. I was there for a couple of years, there was quite an intensive fixture period, and it was an education in terms of

working for a non-league football club and Arsenal."

"It gave me a broad horizon, especially in terms of the politics between football clubs and just the way that people do things differently. It was good for me because I'd worked at Wimbledon and Arsenal and, although I was still employed by Arsenal, I worked for Boreham Wood at the same time, so it gave me more of a perspective of the industry, which was good."

"Throughout the football industry, everybody is dealing with different pressures. No two jobs are the same, and I've learnt that from every job I've had, they have all been totally different. Working at that level, I had to chip in and help with the maintenance of the site sometimes, so it gave me a little bit of an understanding that it isn't always down to the pitch; it's down to helping the football club as well."

"The majority of the time, I would focus on the pitch. When I went in there, I also understood that we had to overhaul the

I oversaw the Desso Grassmaster being installed and took sole charge of that. There was quite an intensive fixture period, and it was an education in terms of working for a non-league football club

machinery and products, but I saw what they had to work with on a day-to-day basis before we got there. So, it refreshed my mind to see how fortunate I was."

"Another thing I learnt was I didn't have three groundsmen at my disposal every day, it was me, and maybe another member of staff from one of the Arsenal sites, or I was on my own. That gave me yet another awakening!"

"After being there for a few years, I wanted to make that step up to work in a bigger stadium environment and endure the challenge of events. Working with James Williams at the London Stadium ticked that box. They had just held the baseball in 2019, and they were looking to hold it again, there were a lot of exciting things happening there. I was looking forward to the athletics, and there was plenty of infrastructure improvement being made, then Covid hit. That kind of ruined all those memories that I wanted to make. I sat in meetings about transitioning the stadium, which really



The Covid gym



Another thing I learnt was I didn't have three groundsmen at my disposal every day, it was me, and maybe another member of staff from one of the Arsenal sites, or I was on my own



Dennis Mowers

interested me, and that's what grabbed my attention about the role and working there, to see how things transitioned whilst working under the different pressures."

"Although Covid managed to halt some career progressive experiences, I left the stadium with a far better understanding of grounds management. James trusted me to assist with budgets, business planning, interview processes, health and safety and the day-to-day maintenance schedules."

Declan's focused career progression has taken the shape of somebody who sets themselves challenges and achieves them. Although calm and considered when he speaks, he is clearly driven to work towards his next goal methodically and, after two years at the London Stadium, he was ready to take the step into full management.

Still in the throes of lockdowns and Covid restrictions, his time at Fulham began through a series of video calls and led to his impromptu interview with then Fulham manager Scott Parker.

"Because of Covid, I had to do my interviews remotely through Teams, and I thought I was having a conversation with the

COO and then a discussion with a member of the squad management, which wasn't going to be Scott. Apparently, on the day, he wanted to take some time out to speak to the person that was going to oversee the pitches, and it was nerve-racking. I've never heard of it before. I hadn't even heard of the coaches being involved in interviews, so to say I was slightly underprepared would be fair. Although this intrigued me because he wanted to know about the person leading the maintenance of the pitches."

"And, from that point, it was good for me to be able to lay my cards on the table and for him to be able to listen to me in terms of building a relationship for us to work together daily."

"It was interesting to have that direct contact and explain about my education and the pathway to where I am, plus the way I look at pitch maintenance and what I'm interested in trying to achieve as a groundsman. I think although Scott was present, Darren, who is the COO, was also on the call, and the feedback and vision of the club that he gave me is what set myself and Fulham onto the path we're on now."

"We all understood each other, and I was interested in how the club was moving forward with potentially having an additional new training ground and building a new stand. For me, it's an exciting club to be a part of, and everything seems to be going forward, so they sold it to me, and I obviously sold myself to them."

"I'd done a little bit of management, and it was where I wanted to be. I've been in the industry now for twelve years, and I have developed progressively over time. This is the role I need to be in now and, so far, it is going well."

For Declan, this role represents an opportunity to put his stamp on a facility and, more importantly, mentor and train his team in the same way he was.

While his immediate priority was to turn the pitches around, his method of doing it was by improving morale amongst the team and introducing new ideas and working practices that enhanced their work-life balance.

Declan explains: "The team had come out of a difficult period in terms of Covid. I don't think I've spoken to anyone who has



Training Pitch



The Arena Pitch



We all understood each other, and I was interested in how the club was moving forward with potentially having an additional new training ground and building a new stand

enjoyed the Covid period, so it was about picking the team up and trying to get everyone singing from the same hymn sheet. Trying to build up the morale in the group, add a bit of structure, and create a better work-life balance. By doing that, it makes everyone happier at work, and it makes everything run a bit more smoothly, but straight away, it was about picking everyone up and trying to get my education and ideas across.

"I believe I've been fortunate with some of the people I've worked under, like Steve

Braddock and his assistant Andy Purser, plus when I was at Boreham Wood, I worked under Paul Ashcroft and then James Williams at the London Stadium. I've picked up bits of knowledge from each of them, so I think using various management skills here is what I need to do."

"The team has worked hard and are progressing daily. We have made many improvements in a short space of time, and I believe the coaching staff are happy with the pitches at present, so we are moving in the right direction."

"It's a very busy site. My deputy, Stuart, always says it's like spinning plates at this training ground, and he is right. One minute we've got the first team, then we've got the U23s, the U18s, U16s matches, the women are here, and the foundation. All that together, along with the pitch maintenance, the irrigation, drainage, machinery upkeep, waste management, landscapes and site operations. Time can be precious, so I quite like the spinning plates analogy because sometimes I go home spinning."

"But that was a part of what drew me in. I

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Training Pitch

didn't come through the door and think this is going to be easy. I need a challenge, and I'm a driven individual. When I walk out of the house in the morning, I want to be busy and keep my mind active, so this role is something that, for the foreseeable future, is going to take time to get the whole department to where I foresee it and then I'm sure other challenges will be set."

So far, by and large, Declan's plans are falling into place and starting to move forward. Embracing technology with a Turf Tank One line marking robot and pitch testing is now on his agenda as he aims to keep all areas of the site in top condition.

"At first, when I found out about robots coming into the industry, I was hesitant, like a lot of people, thinking it won't be long before they take our jobs. But, for us as a team, it is beneficial because it gives us a valuable education in terms of where the industry is going forward with technology. We're starting to use it, which is good because we're getting an education in that. It's sustainable, because it uses less product, and frees up staff to assist with various other maintenance tasks. We have seven people

for a seven-pitch site which can present some challenges, but with little adjustments like the Turf Tank we can still achieve and fulfil the correct practices and standards."

"I've only been here for seven months, we finished our yearly renovations, grown in the pitches and now look forward to the challenges of the winter months."

"We have three different pitch constructions on our site, which means our maintenance tasks can be varied for each pitch. We use pitch testing to analyse the surfaces and maintain as much consistency as possible. Daily, we promote the teams to use different pitches or certain areas to give the plant the most effective recovery periods. The pitch testing data can assist my argument with regards to moving training. It is a busy site, so it's not always easy to keep the pitches as perfect as we'd like them, if I'm honest. The wear management is a constant battle; fortunately, the coaching staff across the site are refreshing and understand we are all a team pulling in the same direction."

"The testing also helps us understand some of our maintenance methods. We've

recently hired an apprentice, and it helps to educate in terms of why and what things are achieving, we analyse the results through the year which gives the lads an understanding of our yearly works schedules. If you just put a hole in the ground, you know you've decompacted it, but how do you measure the results if you don't test?"

"At the moment, I use a pen and paper, but hopefully, when I get my teeth into this place a bit more, we can try and look at different software. I'd rather greet the coaching staff with something a bit more reliable than my piece of paper and dodgy handwriting!"

"That's something we'll look at going forward and, as I said, we've started well, but there are still plenty of improvements for us to make."



I use a pen and paper but I'd rather greet the coaching staff with something a bit more reliable than my piece of paper and dodgy handwriting



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The City Football Academy

Unsung heroes

Head Groundsperson **Lee Metcalfe** has looked after the City Football Academy (CFA) for ten years now. Lee is a household name in our industry, but when Editor Kerry Haywood caught with him to discuss the many challenges over the past couple of years and an increased demand for grass pitches, it's clear that the struggles are real... regardless of how high profile you may be!

Over the past few months, I have started to get back out to conduct site visits and interviews and it's a rather interesting viewpoint in terms of Covid legacy. As you would expect, Premier League clubs are still surrounded by Covid policies and strict entrance rules and it has meant minimised interaction across all levels of sport.

Lee commented: "I think a lot of people have missed interaction during the pandemic and it's been very difficult for new people to come through the door. However,

it's nice to now be getting people in like yourself to talk to and we are always keen on talking to new suppliers."

The City Football Academy (CFA) is home to all of Manchester City's teams of all age groups and there are 13.5 pitches in total plus three astroturf pitches. The Academy is situated in the heart of Manchester, adjacent to the Etihad Stadium and forms part of the wider Etihad Campus - a truly inspirational environment for players to train and play.

Day to day maintenance includes cutting with both hand and ride on mowers,







Without the help and support of the club and every single team member excelling in their roles, we wouldn't have got things done and we wouldn't be where we are today



Lee's best signing - The Turf Tank One



fertilising, divoting and marking out with the Turf Tank One - which Lee describes as their best signing. "After having it on trial for a year or so, the team have really bought into it and we have finally purchased one. Rather than have three or four of the team spending a whole day marking out, it's so easy to just set it up and away it goes, leaving staff free to undertake other tasks."

"Renovations are a key part of life here at the CFA. We get specialist contractors in from mid-April through to mid-July who work on all the surfaces (six Desso pitches, one SIS, one Hero hybrid and five Fibresand), then we seed them and take over from there. During the Christmas break, we will have a mini-renovation on the Academy stadium pitch and Academy Pitches which consists of a light scarification followed by 7-8 tonnes of topdressing. Then we will seed with Johnsons J Premier Pitch and cover goalmouths as required."

"We are continually monitoring maintenance contracts for machines and it

is always a big question about whether to purchase machines outright or lease them. We are always striving to keep up with the market and new developments with machinery and we are currently looking into LED lighting. There are numerous SGL lighting rigs across the site and we have invested heavily in LU440s, but we are committed to creating a sustainable environment and we are constantly looking to find ways to switch to LED and electric mowers in the near future."

"We work very closely with both ICL and Syngenta and utilise a variety of their products across all pitches, including Greenmaster Pro, Sierraform GT plus many granulars and liquids. There is a trial plot available to test out products in our environment before introducing them across all our surfaces in the field."

"Soil analysis and nematode readings are taken every three months, but we tend to stay disease free. If the plant health is good, this should be the case, but the northern



Everyone has their own story to tell and I'm so proud of my team and how they have coped throughout the most challenging period I hope we ever have to deal with





weather can obviously make this more difficult at times. We have a preventative programme in place and we hit that as much as we can, but (as with most places), it's a balancing act between lighting rigs and an integrated turf management programme."

"It's a very fast-paced site with lots of challenges. We can get an email informing us of a last-minute game on tomorrow which means we have to adapt accordingly. The team of all groundstaff at CFA (and Etihad

groundstaff when they have come over to CFA) have been exceptional, and the club are very lucky to have them... but it's very much a team effort and everyone plays their part from club maintenance and facilities managers to FM managers and directors. We are all working and striving for the same result. There are bound to be challenges along the way, but you have to learn from those and move on."

"The site is nine years old and there is



The pressures of getting surfaces back in time, under very pressured conditions, was tasking at times

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Indoor 3G Academy pitches



It's a very fast-paced site with lots of challenges at times. The team of groundstaff have been exceptional, and the club are very lucky to have them

limited space for development, so if that means turning a Fibresand pitch into a hybrid, it's something we need to plan for. There are more teams and more demand for grass surfaces now we have the Women's Development Centre based here, so this will certainly be a requirement at some point. It's something we are planning for, and it might take a few years to implement, but we are always looking to move forward."

"The Women's Euro's is coming up in summer 2022, where we will host three games and also provide a training base. In light of this, renovations will be undertaken

early, but there will be a number of challenges. Usually, the Academy team return a week or two before the first team, but we have to keep certain pitches open from a commercial aspect, so we will need to work around all of that."

"In conjunction with Grounds Manager Roy Rigby, Head Landscaper Dan Lewis manages the 80-acre site's aesthetics, along with a team of four others from idverde. They have done a lot to improve biodiversity in terms of badgers, foxes etc, but we can have issues with them digging up pitches on occasion. The site used to be very wet and boggy before we took it on and we also still suffer with Canadian Geese. I'm also certain that pigeons can smell grass seed, as we get them in abundance."

"The site is fantastic, but it can be challenging at times. We utilise TurfKeeper which is paramount to keeping track of what work has been undertaken by our three teams across all the pitches. It's handy to see at a glance when a surface was fertilised or divoted etc and see all the stats. Each team member can populate the system and everything is monitored which it



The most important part of all this is that there is more to life than worrying about grass, and people's mental health and well-being is paramount



I think a lot of people have missed interaction during the pandemic and it's been very difficult for new people to come through the door

makes scheduling much easier. It's become a quick reference point for Covid outbreaks and we can see where teams have worked etc and draw references from year to year."

"Over the last couple of years staff issues have been challenging, but we have been very focused on the safety and well-being of the team and we are still working in bubbles of three as a preventative. Obviously, our club policy is still in place, as is a covid isolation period, so it remains difficult to

manage staff levels. It's certainly been an interesting time, with learning how to manage staff shortages, how to react differently, abiding by new Premier League rules, testing etc., and none of the team were furloughed throughout the entire period."

"The team is split into two; a First Team and an Academy team where we work across dedicated shift patterns. The days can be long and I feel this is a major part

of why people are being put off a career in this industry."

"It can be a stressful environment to work in and I myself have suffered throughout the pandemic with anxiety and stress - not all to do with the job, but homelife and generally interacting with people/crowds etc. I still don't like going into supermarkets and I think the long-term effects are going to last a good few years with some people. I can have good days and bad days, good



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hours and bad hours, but the club have been exceptionally supportive and I know they will listen. It's so important to open up and talk about things, and you generally find that those people who have had their own experiences will open up and share given the opportunity... we can all help each other. Everyone has their own story to tell and I'm so proud of my team and how they have coped throughout the most challenging period I hope we ever have to deal with."

"When Covid started nearly two years ago, we had to make a decision whether we could start renovations (given the governments guidelines) and we had to continue with a significantly reduced amount of staff and resources, but we did it. The pressures of getting those surfaces back in time and still delivering the same service, under very pressured and unprecedented conditions, was tasking at times. Without the help and support of the club and every single team member

excelling in their roles, we wouldn't have got things done and we wouldn't be where we are today. It was an ever-changing world and we had to adapt every day, but everybody has played their part, including all our partners. Having said that, the most important part of all this is that there is more to life than worrying about grass, and people's mental health and well-being is paramount."



It's so important to open up and talk about things, and you generally find that those people who have had their own experiences will open up and share given the opportunity



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FIFA Update

Spreading the Word

Less than a year from now, the culmination of years' worth of work will be played out in front of a global audience during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The build-up to the tournament has been far from conventional, starting with the climatic conditions the games are played in through to the Covid-19 pandemic that has shifted a lot of the later work online

Going into September 2021, preparations for the tournament have reached a critical point where all the new pitches and equipment procured to maintain them was fully tested during the FIFA Arab Cup to be held in Qatar in December 2021. The event was used as the full test event for the World Cup. A match schedule set out to similar times as the main event was followed, testing everyone and everything connected to the tournament.

Since September, nearly all the pitches in the stadiums have been stitched and have had vacuum and ventilation systems added to them. As FIFA Pitch Management Manager, Alan Ferguson, explains, these technologies, coupled with a comprehensive range of equipment, will ensure FIFA delivers the best group of pitches ever assembled for a World Cup.

"I am really excited about where we are now because it's been a tough two and half years, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

"One of the main deliverables now, for myself and the team, is to ensure the 477 strong grounds teams that will deliver the pitches for the tournament fully understand what is expected of them and understand how to get the best out of the equipment and new technologies that have been installed."

"The recent workshop delivered in Qatar from the 6th to the 9th September was FIFA's biggest single pitch-focused workshop ever organised. The workshop was held in the magnificent Al Bayt stadium, one of eight ready to host the 2022 finals."

"We aimed to bring together a key speaker from each supplier to deliver a presentation, then carry on to deliver a series of practical clinics. The workshop programme has been built up since I took up my position back in 2018. The larger tournaments now demand bigger and more detailed workshops. When I joined FIFA, one of the five key deliverables around my job was to improve workshops and the educational delivery around them. We have worked hard to date to get the tournament workshops right, and I believe we are getting there with them, and Qatar is another milestone along the way."

"In Qatar, the pitch maintenance is delivered by four companies, Al Nakheel, SAIC, AGME and Pergola, along with the Aspire team number involved in the pitch delivery."

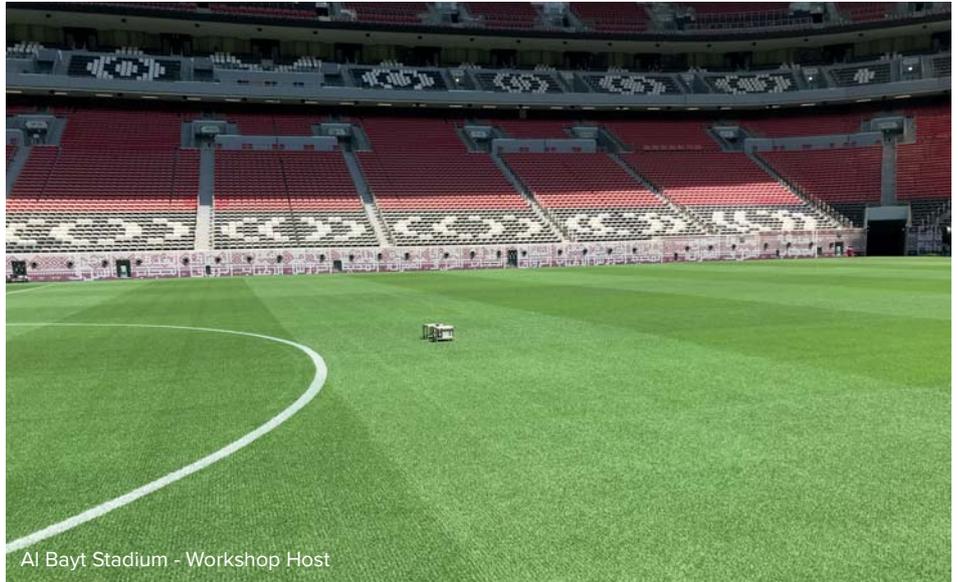
"With all pitches in the World Cup stadiums now installed with hybrid stitching, vacuum and ventilation systems, as well as grow lights, we have a good idea what the programme should look like. We want it to encompass everything from mowing and line marking to setting up the lights and I think, to do that, it is really important to get



Mower training in Douala, Cameroon



With all pitches in the World Cup stadiums now installed with hybrid stitching, vacuum and ventilation systems, as well as grow lights, we have a good idea what the programme should look like



Al Bayt Stadium - Workshop Host



Bernhard's Steve Nixon presenting in Al Bayt

the manufacturers who make these products involved.”

To give all those attending an in-depth experience, Alan decided to split the general maintenance part of the workshop over two days, and with each day seeing a percentage of each company's workforce attend. The main aim is to instil the one team approach and encourage networking and an exchange of knowledge that can see the pitch objectives achieved.

The workshop on grow lights was moved to a day on its own. SGL, who provided the lights in Doha, already delivered showcases, and Alan felt it was a no-brainer to add a showcase to the workshop programme.

Starting at 9.00am, Steve Nixon opened the workshop from Bernhard and Company, focusing on grinding and the need to prepare your cylinder properly. Each stadium has Bernhard grinders in them as well units at the company's Qatari dealer HQ.

Hydro Turf, who handle several machines in Doha, will support the mowing operation

from their new premises in the North of Doha. Their role throughout the build-up and during the tournament is to maintain mowers from any stadium that is unable to do so themselves. With games coming every 48 hours over the group stage, replacement machines have to be immediately available.

Toby Clarke, who represented Dennis Mowers at the event, covered best practice, maintenance, and delivered an in-depth look at the new electric Premier machines used on the match pitches. The introduction of new electric machinery is an important aspect of FIFA carbon-neutral aims and highlights the need for up-to-date workshops that are constantly being adapted as new technology is introduced.

Alan and Andy Cole from iTurf, the tournament appointed agronomist, then delivered a joint presentation on the FIFA requirements, with everything from pitch testing to line marking is explained to the delegates.

A lunch and networking opportunity then



The combination of practical clinics and theory sessions work really well and, by hosting the workshop in Al Bayt stadium, we can demonstrate things in the exact environment everyone will be working in



Grinding clinic



The Doha team

followed before Russell Latham from Premier Pitches, leading exponents of hybrid fibre maintenance, explained how the hybrid fibre needs to be maintained throughout the tournament, before the delegates split into five groups for the practical sessions.

For Alan, gathering leading industry figures from the United Kingdom and America together is a significant step forward in turf education and will give the World Cup pitches the best chance of

success and leave a lasting legacy from the tournament.

“The workshop aimed to give the local grounds teams as much knowledge on the new technologies as possible in one week,” Alan begins. “The combination of practical clinics and theory sessions work really well and, by hosting the workshop in Al Bayt stadium, we can demonstrate things in the exact environment everyone will be working in.”

“We had Steve from Bernhard delivering a theory session in one area and Hydro Turf holding a clinic in the workshop at the same time. It’s a very engaging environment for the people attending, and I think that’s important at an event like this because we want everyone to be invested in the process, and preparing them for it is the best way I think we can do that.”

“Mixing the theoretical and practical aspects is very important, and having people

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Keith Kent leading the line marking clinic

like Keith Kent, who is well known for his time at Manchester United and Twickenham, taking practical sessions out on the pitch is great. He has the experience that needs to be passed on to other groundsmen because he's got it through years of work, and it'll be invaluable to the people attending when they are in the thick of a tournament."

"Keith was doing line marking for us, and it's so crucial now with VAR and goal-line technology that the lines are perfect. Gone are the days when you could get away with lines being a few millimetres out here and there because, when the Technology Team put the lines on your TV screen to show offside or goal-line technology to determine whether the ball has crossed the line or not, any discrepancy in the lines is clearly highlighted."

"For me, one of the workshop highlights was the session on the vacuum and

ventilation system. The session was presented by Steve Wilson from Bernhard, who represents Sub Air in Europe. While Steve was unable to be at the event in person, he demonstrated the flexibility of the system from New York by showing delegates how to operate it remotely which is a positive of that system."

"Having all the eight stadiums fitted with vacuum and ventilation systems working in conjunction with the HVAC stadium cooling has given us the temperature control above and below the ground essential for success in growing grass in the desert. For us, we were able to use these sessions to show everyone how it works and why it is so essential."

Whilst the build-up to the World Cup in 2022 is taking centre stage and is now in full swing, it's not all about Qatar for Alan. In 2021, FIFA started a support programme to

the Confederation of African Football (CAF) which has required immediate attention in the lead up to the African Cup of Nations.

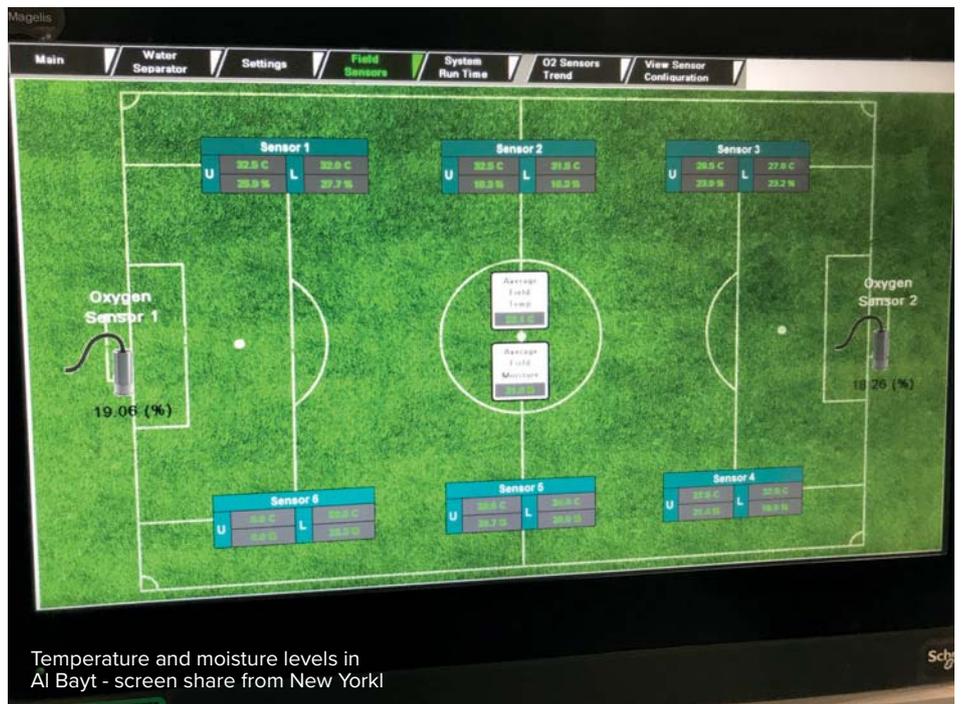
The aim of the programme is simple: to improve the build-up and delivery of the continent's biggest tournament as well as helping the fifty-five Member associations that makeup CAF improve their stadium and pitch facilities.

The delayed 2021 tournament will be hosted in Cameroon from the 9th January to the 6th February in 2022. Alan already made the first inspection back in May and one of the key requirements to come from that inspection was the delivery of five workshops in the five host cities.

The tournament will be hosted in the Capital Yaoundé (two stadiums), Baffoussam (one stadium), Garoua (one stadium), Limbe (one stadium) and Douala (one stadium). The project team from the FIFA side have been



Keith was doing line marking for us, and it's so crucial now with VAR and goal-line technology that the lines are perfect. Gone are the days when you could get away with lines being a few millimetres out here and there



Temperature and moisture levels in Al Bayt - screen share from New York!



Steve Wilson for Sub Air presenting from New York



For me, one of the workshop highlights was the session on the vacuum and ventilation system. The session was presented by Steve Wilson from Bernhard, who represents Sub Air in Europe

seconded to Cameroon to work with the local organising committee and the CAF team. A decision was taken to take the workshop to each of the five cities, which Alan fully supports.

“The grounds teams here have never had any form of proper or detailed pitch education, and by taking the workshop to them in their own stadiums, it gave us more one to one opportunities,” Alan explains.

“As part of the support, twelve Dennis G860 mowers have been sent to Cameroon complete with cassettes. FIFA has also sent five line marking kits developed by Linemark UK and FIFA. The groundsmen in Cameroon need this support because you cannot expect them to produce pitches if they don't have the tools to do it. But making key equipment available is one thing; teaching the teams how to use it is another.

“The workshop model we've worked on and honed can be rolled out in other countries. That is why it was so essential for us to cater it to every level of experience. We are dealing with people with varying skill sets from one day to the next, but often the needs are the same. For example, some might never have used a vacuum and ventilation system before and need assistance with it, whereas some might

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Whilst excellent progress has been made, the team have barely managed to get past the tip of the iceberg. The world is a big place, and the goal remains to reach all of our 211 member associations in the six Confederations

never have used a proper pedestrian mower or line marker. For us, the challenge is making sure we don't miss anyone out and guarantee as best we can that, when we leave a country after a tournament, the standard of education within the groundsman we've worked with is better."

"Whilst excellent progress has been made, the team have barely managed to get past the tip of the iceberg. The world is a big place, and the goal remains to reach all of our 211 member associations in the six Confederations. Particular attention will be focused on regions such as Asia and Africa to bring them up to a good standard in line with the other confederations."

"The team are already reaching out to educational partners and working with leading grounds managers to help spread the word and, hopefully, this is a programme



Mower training in Douala, Cameroon

that will continue to gather pace."

"Throughout 2022, I will be aiming to introduce a mixture of live workshops and online learning. There are plenty of good quality providers, and we certainly do not want to re-invent the wheel, but as the world governing body, I see our role to bring the educational providers and groundskeepers in need of the training together."

"From the workshops we have already held, I'm hoping to introduce a form of grant funding through the member associations. From here, those who do not have laptops or the facility to get online will have the same opportunity as anyone else. It seems crazy that here we are in 2021 and we are only now talking about rolling this out, but it is better late than never. Of course, this should have been done years ago, and we could discuss the rights and wrongs of this

until the cows come home, but the important thing is there is now a structure within FIFA that can make this happen and a group of people who are both professional and passionate enough to make it succeed," Alan concludes



We certainly do not want to re-invent the wheel, but as the world governing body, I see our role to bring the educational providers and groundskeepers in need of the training together



Alan Ferguson in conversation in Douala, Cameroon



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Chesham United FC

The Generals



Nicknamed ‘the Generals’, Chesham United Football Club is a semi-professional football club in Buckinghamshire who play in the Southern League Premier Division South. The part-time groundsman is **Craig Ringsell** and we recently met him to discuss how he juggles his time between the club and his successful contracting business

Craig set up Craig Ringsell Sports Pitches and Garden Services in 2008 and his hard work and dedication to what he does has definitely paid off. He now looks after thirteen cricket clubs based around Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, as well as Great Missenden Tennis Club, Dr Challoners Grammar School and Chesham United Football Club, where he has tended to the pitch for the last thirteen years. He has made some significant improvements in the playing surface with a

limited budget to work with.

“When I first arrived, the pitch was bare with no grass cover to speak of and the goalmouths had drainage issues. Other than that, it was just in need of some good turf management techniques and seasonal renovation work.”

“Over the years, the surface has been improved by incorporating many tonnes of rootzone but, in the last three years due to budget constraints, I have not been able to add to this when renovating. We have only been able to carry out basic

renovations, which includes spreading sixty tonnes of sand, verti-drain and overseed. We do not need to scarify the pitch at the end of the season, as the number of games has significantly reduced the grass cover on the pitch.”

“The drainage is a funny one. When it’s raining, if you lift up the manhole in the corner of the ground, there’s hardly any water flowing. I do not know where the water goes, but it drains really well. The pitch was underwater a few times last year, but the water had drained away within a couple of hours. In all my years at the club, I don’t recall ever having a game called off for a waterlogged pitch and, all in all, I have only lost around a dozen games due to snow and frost.”

Irrigation for the pitch consists of two taps using the mains water and the pressure is pretty good. This enables Craig to run out two separate hoses and sprinklers to either end of the pitch, where he mainly covers the



//

I spend a lot of time with the fork. Whenever possible, I will be out there divoting at the start, half time and at the end of the game for half an hour to put the worst damage back together. It is so important to divot



goal areas and centre circle in dry weather. "I would love a fully automatic irrigation system, but that is never going to happen on this site. However, that dream may come true when the club hopefully moves to a new ground."

"It's all up in the air at the minute, but the plan is to move to a new development about two miles away from here. The club is progressing rapidly with a ladies team, bundles of kids' teams and a groundshare agreement with Aylesbury Utd over the past three years. The club really wants two artificials, but I think they would invest in a hybrid pitch for the main stadium to start with. They have a budget where they need to play so many games to cover costs. Still, I feel a hybrid pitch is more environmentally friendly and other clubs around the country have shown that, if they are managed and renovated in the right way, they can accommodate over one hundred games per season."

"In the meantime, the maintenance programme for a typical week (in summer) would include clearing up on a Monday after the weekend's games. First, I will give

it a divot followed by the Kubota G23 or the Dennis G860 with the verti-cut cassette, to clear up any debris. More often than not, we will have a game on a Tuesday night so, once the pitch is clean, I will cut with a Dennis G860 at 30mm - I will not go any lower than this due to the amount of use it gets. I would like to take it a little bit shorter, but there would be no grass on it at the end of the season."

"I spend a lot of time with the fork. Whenever possible, I like to be here for Chesham's home games and I will be out there divoting at the start, half time and at the end of the game for half an hour to put the worst damage back together. It is so important to divot and put it back straight away, that I can even find myself here early on Sunday mornings for a few hours."

"Presentation is important to me, so I will always measure out the shades at the beginning of the season and cut down the strings. If I get the time, I have been known to put a circular pattern in now and again to vary the cut. I try to use the cylinder mower as much as possible; it gives a better finish and a cleaner cut, but when I'm struggling for



The school leavers seem more inclined to do less physical work and they do not want to work the weekends. The unsociability of working in sport is not as appealing as it maybe once was





When I first arrived, the pitch was bare with no grass cover to speak of and the goalmouths had drainage issues. Other than that, it was just in need of some good turf management techniques

time or the pitch is being used heavily in the week, I will use the rotary mid-mounted deck on the Kubota.”

“I mark out once a week using the Fleet Kombi spray marker. At the beginning of this season, I was lucky enough to use a GPS line marker to come and initially mark in my pitch, which did a great job and saved me a considerable amount of time.”

“My aeration programme includes a Verti-drain or an Imants Shockwave around

four times a year to a depth of eight inches, depending on the weather and budget. I don’t have my own aeration equipment, so I get a friend of mine who has a renovation contracts company to carry out this work for me on all the sites I look after.”

Craig is fortunate enough that the pitch does not get affected much by pests and diseases. “They have had some big problems with leatherjackets at the local golf club down the road but, touch wood,

we have not been troubled with them. We do get the odd fox messing and digging the pitch up and a Muntjac now and again that likes to dig up the penalty spots at the same time each year. On the whole, we are pretty lucky.”

Craig has his hands full with the Chesham pitch, as well as the many cricket squares and tennis courts he maintains. “I will prepare wickets fourteen days in advance starting on a Monday. I keep to the basics



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Getting Personal

Craig Ringsell - he wants to win an Olympic medal and Southgate needs to be worried!

Who are you? Craig Ringsell, contractor at Chesham United FC with my own business Ringsell Sports Pitches and Garden Surfaces.

Family status. Married to Joanne, with two children; Freya (6) and Ollie (4).

Who's your hero and why? It has to be my Dad as he has been a great support from the day I was born. Always there when I need him... and the same for my mother.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Winning Southern Groundsman of Year 2012.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? You have done well for yourself and all the hard work has paid off.

Which famous people wind you up? Anyone from the Government.

What job would you love, other than your own? England football manager.

What is your favourite film? Pulp Fiction.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Grumpy Groundsman with Richard Wilson.

What is your favourite sport? Football.

What would you cast into Room 101? Brambles, cricket umpires and real ale.

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

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To win a gold medal at the Olympics.



Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Bobby Moore, Alex Ferguson and David Jason.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Put the effort in and you will get the rewards.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? The moon has its own time zones.

What's your favourite smell? Fresh bread.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? How do you get the stripes?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Ransomes Mastiff - it leaves a great finish, plus my trusty fork!

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Reliable, hardworking, but stupid at times.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman? Always listen and ask if you are unsure.

What talent would you like to have? To see into the future.



Before renovations



After

and I have tried to simplify the process to enable me to still provide a good quality playing surface; this enables me to get around all the grounds. Prep includes cutting, brushing and raking the wicket out. Some of the bigger clubs will then water for me the night before I come in and roll it on a Wednesday. Thursday, I go around the smaller village clubs and work on their wickets ready for the weekend. On a Saturday, I cut eight of the main grounds before their match that day. Finally, I go back in on a Sunday to cut and remark for the next game.... then it all starts again. Given the opportunity, I would love to work on a county ground for a week to pick up some new ideas which I could use to improve my knowledge further."

"The tennis courts have still got around 7mm of thatch, so I will verti-cut them at least once a month using the Dennis G860 and they are cut

three times a week with the cylinder mower. During the summer, seaweed and iron is applied to keep them green and I feed when I can. I hire a Graden to deep scarify at the end of the season and carry out three passes before a tonne application of GOSTD loam per court and then overseed. In winter, I go over them once a month with a spiker."

It's clear that Craig has an abundance of experience and knowledge and we were keen to hear how his career path formed. After leaving sixth form, he attended Aylesbury College to complete a Horticultural Course. At the same time, he got an apprenticeship position at a private hospital looking after the lawns and a small nine-hole golf course. Once he finished his college course, he joined Flackwell Heath Golf Club as an assistant greenkeeper, where he hoped to continue his career, but that wasn't to





be after two years.

“A few people started to leave, so I decided to go and work for a local garden maintenance company who my dad also worked for. After a couple of years, I saw the opportunity to go and work at a school in Watford as an assistant groundsman and, after two years, I took over as the head groundsman. After a further two years, the opportunity came up to join Cumberland Lawn Tennis Club/Hampstead Cricket Club and I took the live-in position. After three years, things weren't right, so I left there and joined a school in Barnet for ten months.”

“I was doing four jobs for someone else, which included the maintenance of a school and three cricket clubs. I started having a word around some of the local clubs and I picked up one or two of my own. From there, things progressed and I decided to set up my own business in 2008. I picked up two crickets clubs around Bedfordshire, whose marks were abysmal and they didn't know what they were doing. After improving these surfaces, word got around and I picked up

four more cricket clubs. Out of the blue, I also ended up with Great Missenden Tennis Club, where the grass courts were horrendous and had 25mm of thatch. I started there four years ago and I have managed to turn those courts around with some TLC.”

Ending the interview, Craig gave us his thoughts on the issues our industry is facing at this present time. “I have seen many clubs advertising job vacancies at the moment, which gives the impression there are not many people around to fill the positions. I believe some of the low wages that are offered and the hours we have to work are not appealing to a lot of the younger generation. They are drawn to other careers where the work-life balance is more appealing and generally better paid. I have found it difficult myself to get help. In the summer holidays, I had a couple of lads to come and help me. They start at 9:00am, but you get to 3:00pm and they think that their working day is done and want to go home.”

“I have additional help from retired

gentleman - including my dad and a few others who I can rely upon. The school leavers seem more inclined to do less physical work and they do not want to work the weekends. The unsociability of working in sport is not as appealing as it maybe once was.”



I feel a hybrid pitch is more environmentally friendly. If they are managed and renovated in the right way, they can accommodate over one hundred games per season



What's in the shed

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- Lloyds Paladin x 2
- Ransomes Certes 20 inch x 2
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- Ransomes Mastiff
- Dennis G860 with interchangeable cassettes
- SISIS scarifier
- Combi Rakes x 2
- SISIS Truspred
- Fleet Kombi marker x 2

University of East Anglia

Conservation to new heights

On World Environment Day, 5 June 2019, the **University of East Anglia** (UEA) joined forces with other organisations worldwide to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. Based in Norwich, Norfolk, UEA has led the way in climate change through the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (CRU), the Climate Research Unit and researchers in other UEA schools.

Blair Ferguson reports



The CRU first brought global warming to the world's attention with the global temperature record and continue to contribute to the world discussion with the Tyndall Centre's Global Carbon Budget, the update for international policymakers on fossil fuel emissions.

Two and a half years after this declaration, the climate discussion has gathered significant pace with the COP26 summit in Glasgow, bringing the world's considerable issues to the fore. While UEA has contributed substantially to the climate

change effort, they are also exceptionally conscious of practising what they preach.

The university estates are under the control of Landscapes Manager Tom Everett, who has the considerable job of keeping all of the areas within his 360-acre remit in prime condition while considering the biodiversity within each space.

Tom and his team of fourteen, consisting of grounds people, sports groundsmen and pest controllers, are responsible for the Colney Road Playing Fields, Sportsark, five County Wildlife Sites within the grounds, amenity areas, re-wilded areas, marshlands,





“
I'm sure the university itself is going to expand, and they will be wanting more people to come in, and more people means more sport, so I'm feeling positive about being able to accommodate them

Groundsman Peter Lewis



Fleet linemarker

woodlands and the UEA broad, all of which are home to over 5,700 species.

Each area is as important as the next for Tom. He began his time at UEA in 2006 as a digger and tractor driver before progressing to be a team leader and then into the role he has held for six years.

Although the urgent need for conservation is a priority, the needs and wellbeing of the 16,872 student population are paramount, and for a large number of them, sport is a massive part of student life.

The Colney Road sports site lies the edge of campus, with the late November Norfolk sun beaming across the healthy-looking turf and sports groundsman Peter Lewis, who has worked at UEA for twenty years. The twelve pitches and two cricket squares are some of the most used grass areas at the university, and as Tom explains, they are vital to student life.

“The university has teams for football, rugby, cricket, American football, ultimate frisbee, lacrosse, baseball and softball, so sport plays a huge role here,” Tom begins.

“I think it ticks a lot of boxes in terms of wellbeing and getting people outside, and

we are fortunate that the students want to get outside and use the facilities we have here, and it’s really important for us to provide them. It’s a big thing at the Uni which is always growing in popularity, so it will be a good driver for us in grounds to put a business case together to say we need more resources over here, and as we slowly claw our way out of this pandemic stretch, it will be good to see that investment.”

“I’m sure the university itself is going to expand, and they will be wanting more people to come in, and more people means more sport, so I’m feeling positive about being able to accommodate them.”

The principal task to host hundreds of fixtures and training sessions falls to Peter, who this year has the fresh challenge of an additional school using the pitches and portable floodlights that have elongated training.

“Everything is a challenge,” Peter laughs. “I enjoy it; otherwise, I wouldn’t be here, but it is a challenge.”

“Someone will be kicking a ball on the football pitch every day. They are played on every night because we have portable



We are in our first year with this new programme, and hopefully, with some investment, we can keep the pitches where they are and continue to provide quality surfaces for the teams





Pete and Tom



I don't want to be one of those teams that is stagnant and only do the things we need to do. We like to get involved in everything we can really because if you have the knowledge, you should use it

floodlights now. Everyone trained from four o'clock until ten for every sport, and one pitch used to get trashed. Now they all get quite worn because they can move the floodlights around. This is the first year with them, so we are seeing how it goes, but as long as the weather stays nice, we should be alright, but the pitches do look worn because they get used that much more now."

"On a Wednesday, we'll generally have a

full house of fixtures throughout the day, and some pitches, like the lacrosse pitch, will have back to back games on it. There are more fixtures at the weekend and training all week, and Stoke Holy Cross has their U9s and U11s using the site constantly all year round."

"The schedule we have makes routine maintenance very important to keep the quality up. On Mondays, I'll Quadraplay every pitch; on Tuesdays, I'll mark out

and then on Wednesday, it's games day, and generally, every pitch will be in use. On Thursday, I roll and aerate on rotating weeks, and hopefully, they are in good condition for the weekend; if not, I'll overmark them again. I would aerate more often with the Sisis Meagslit if I had the time, but currently, that is the schedule we have."

"We do get the natural gaps at Christmas, Easter and during the summer for more extensive work and renovations but because

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Broad

of Covid, that has gone a bit differently. During the summer, we have cricket, and Stoke will be playing on their pitches as well. Because of the pandemic, the students came back for the summer, and everybody wanted to play everything, so we had every sport going alongside cricket, so it was exceptionally busy.”

“We missed our renovation during the first lockdown because we didn’t have any supplies, but because no one was playing, it recovered quite well. Last year, we managed to seed everything, and it was a good year for seed, and it looked fabulous.”

“There is a longer playing season that seems to extend into the summer, but once everyone has packed up and gone for summer holidays, then you’re renovating, which isn’t a good time of year for it because generally, it is dry as a bone. Lacrosse will

finish before anything else, but because we are hiring a lot of gear, you only want to hire it once as opposed to five times, so it all gets done at the same time. Last year, it was ideal because it was warm and rained a lot, but sometimes you put the seed down and won’t see a thing until almost autumn when it pops up.”

“As I say, we are in our first year with this new programme, and hopefully, with some investment, we can keep the pitches where they are and continue to provide quality surfaces for the teams.”

Away from the grass surfaces, UEA’s SportsPark also hosts outdoor football, hockey, tennis and athletics to complete the sports offering. Tom’s commendation of Peter’s passion, experience and knowledge before we depart to view the rest of the campus is well deserved.



Student halls

Clearly, like many groundsmen, he cares about his pitches, and it is a great credit to him that they are in such good condition with all the use they have.

Stepping a few feet away from the pitches brings conservation back into focus. Many of them have hay meadows created around the edges to promote biodiversity, and just beyond, there are large areas of marshland and woodland. These areas engage schools within the university just as much as sports and play an equally prominent role in an academic sense with studies and research.

Having the buy-in of departments has enriched the work of Tom and his team as they can lean on the experience of lecturers who have helped mould the Biodiversity Management Plan and steer the continued efforts of conservation.

Tom explains: “We work with some really key stakeholders within estates and key stakeholders in some of the schools, like the School of Bio, for example. There is a great pool of knowledge there, and we work with some great ecologists who help us put management plans together for the campus grounds to promote biodiversity.”



We take a lot of consideration in those areas because we have a lot of red-listed species, and when we need to do bank reinstatement work, we have to obtain a licence from Natural England



One of the Colney pitches



American football and lacrosse pitch

“The schools that are situated here undertake a lot of field studies within the grounds, so the school of bio is monitoring the areas of ecological conservation. Environmental sciences use the grounds to take soil samples and look at everything from stone age farming to the makeup of the ground, so it’s really useful for us to tap into that knowledge, and they have been really supportive, which is great.”

“I think we have to be integrated into the university, and the areas the different schools want to look into are things we all like doing anyway. I don’t want to be one of those teams that is stagnant and only do the things we need to do. We like to get involved in everything we can really because if you have the knowledge there, then you should use it, and also, it is lovely to have such a diverse bunch of people around the site because it makes it so much more interesting.”

“We’re constantly gaining knowledge about what biodiversity is using the site and why. I come from a landscaping background and always appreciated nature, but my pool of knowledge wasn’t that significant; but as a

team, we are learning all the time, but we now know if we do this, then that will help that. So, for example, we cut the hedges outside of the bird nesting season, and we do all of our shrub maintenance and cutting back at different times of the year, so we don’t upset anything nesting and a lot of our work is now concentrated around that - especially in the amenity and biodiverse areas.”

“We are seeing a lot more respect for the outdoor areas around the campus now, which is wonderful. I know we have struggled with resources in the past, and I totally understand that, but again, our voice is definitely heard throughout the university now. It is a big thing on the Vice-Chancellor’s mind as well with conservation and climate change.”

“We have the amenity areas we want to have for student activity for their enjoyment and the presentation of the campus, but within those now, we are looking at ways to improve those areas to perhaps tick some of the ecology boxes. Again, we try to use native species planting within the flowerbeds, shrub beds and trees



It ticks a lot of boxes in terms of wellbeing and getting people outside, and we are fortunate that the students want to get outside and use the facilities we have here, and it’s really important for us to provide them





Everything is a challenge. I enjoy it; otherwise, I wouldn't be here, but it is a challenge



that are planted on campus to help what is already there.”

“There are 360 acres of active ground that we look after. We have large areas of marshland, and they also need managing. You can't let them sit dormant. We have grazing regimes on those with the campus cows, and on the marsh at Bluebell Road, we cut a third back of the tree growth on there, so there's always something to do. We take a lot of consideration in those areas because we have a lot of red-listed species, and when we need to do bank reinstatement work, we have to obtain a licence from Natural England because we have the Norfolk Hawker Dragon fly there.”

“Adjacent to our sports pitches, we have got some really significant areas of ecological conservation, for example, there is a hill called Lusty Hills, which is a triangular shape and is an acre and a half. There is a lot of biodiversity in there, and we have to be mindful of what we do, even on the sports pitch side of things.”

Clearly, the aims set out in 2019 have resonated with Tom, who has taken the time to educate himself and his team about what

they can do to contribute. In the future, this effort will include student and staff volunteer groups and the continued contribution of the general public, who are welcomed onto the UEA campus.

The enthusiasm of all involved will be shaped by the new Biodiversity and Conservation Management Plan that is currently being drawn together. Using decades worth of knowledge and expertise, this will likely elevate UEA's conservation efforts to new heights, and through the hard work and dedication of Tom and his team, ensure that the site that has given so much to tackle climate change continues to do more.



We are seeing a lot more respect for the outdoor areas around the campus now, which is wonderful. Our voice is definitely heard throughout the university now





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Oldham College

Marks of distinction

Training excellence is the calling card for a North West college breaking new ground in developing the next generation of greenkeepers and parks professionals, Greg Rhodes discovers

Greenkeeping standards in the North West look set for a seismic shift as a network of clubs from Greater Manchester to the Lancashire coast nurture tomorrow's talent.

A major force behind that drive for excellence is Oldham College - a new kid on the block in terms of training provision but one making a major mark on the golfing, football and local authority landscape.

Behind this transformation in course care is Phil Lomas. He's an experienced hand at training, having spent nearly twenty years at Myerscough College before moving across to Oldham College as tutor and assessor for the Golf Greenkeeping and Horticulture course.

Establishing the department was one of Phil's first tasks on landing at Oldham four years ago. Today, the college works with some thirty courses and a number of local authorities across Greater Manchester in what is a pioneering plan to create a greenkeeping and horticultural community thriving on a new generation of highly qualified professionals.

The quality and style of delivery of Oldham's Level 2 and 3 provision is the secret behind such a strong following - and the College's growing reputation in the greenkeeping and horticulture sector.

Phil switched career trajectories in February 2017 with his move to Oldham College. "I wanted a fresh challenge," he reveals. After several meetings with Euey Madden, principal green space manager for Oldham Council's Environmental Services Department, business proposals including a training centre in Alexandra Park - Oldham's premier park - were put forward and agreed, and Phil was on his way as a training provider, born and bred locally.

"Euey had a vision of a land-based skills centre at the Park and we both developed the concept," Phil adds. "I started to deliver parks, gardens and green spaces for the staff at Oldham Council and to develop the greenkeeping aspect too. I sourced students and expanded my network of employer contacts, by word of mouth mainly, to help establish the service."

College strategy

As part of Phil's strategy from day one, he has sought to expand the range of opportunities for employers in Oldham and surrounding areas, as well as council and golf club employees.

He promotes Oldham as the first choice for training bodies, including BIGGA's Greenkeepers Training Committee, for tutoring and assessments and to utilise facilities at Alexandra Park, particularly an indoor centre to train apprentices in elements of horticulture that include tending flower beds, shrubbery and amenity turf.

"Previously, the council had put many apprentices through other providers but liked the idea of training being provided by the local college, especially as the tutor was locally born. So those now go through Oldham College."

"The council was key to us setting up the department," says Phil. "The greenkeepers were an added attraction. One that the department has developed to become an integral aspect of its plan for growth."

"Oldham Council wants to upskill its own staff, including improving park staff skills," Phil says, "and we run Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships in parks and gardens to help with this upskilling."

Oldham Council also has its own Traineeship programme - 12 workers are taken on each year, usually long-term unemployed, and they





Phil Lomas, left, with assessor Nick Atkinson



If a vacancy arises within the parks department, trainees have an opportunity for full-time work. The scheme is working very well to date

can take a Level 1 qualification as part of improving their personal and professional skills. “The course gives them a regimented working life for six months,” Phil states.

“If a vacancy arises within the parks department, trainees have an opportunity for full-time work. The scheme is working very well to date; some twenty Level 1 trainees have progressed into full-time work with the council and about half of these have gone on to a Level 3 apprenticeship.”

And, with the launch of the Northern Roots initiative, 160 acres of green space - the largest such underused area in the town - being developed right alongside Alexandra Park as an urban farm and eco park, the call for qualified staff will continue.

Phil is also seeking to train new and existing staff, give local people opportunities, use Alexandra Park to attract students from other authorities into Oldham for their training, and meet the needs of the local



Craig O'Donnell, apprentice at High Legh Golf Club

community by contributing to improving public health in ways such as providing vegetable planter courses for residents, which certainly chimes with national initiatives.

Huge potential

“There’s huge potential for apprentices if employers treat them well,” Phil insists. “For clubs and councils, it’s a sustainable way to grow their staff by training up a qualified greenkeeper or gardener for themselves.”

“They may decide to move on, of course, but the chances are they will stay if the work environment is good. Our experience is that apprentices develop a sense of pride in what they do and a high percentage of them are delighted to continue at their present place of employment.”

“When recruiting, the calibre of staff needed for the job is proving so difficult for clubs and councils, work-based apprenticeships present a viable route to

attracting good quality young people,” Phil adds.

But recruitment woes begin much earlier on the career path, Phil believes.

“Barriers to entering the sector present themselves at school level as the curriculum fails to promote greenkeeping and horticulture as career options,” he states.

“One apprentice told me his school was trying to push him down other career avenues, but he developed a passion for greenkeeping and refused to be steered away from what he wanted to do.”

Ingrained attitudes in education are prejudicing students’ choices, he adds. “At secondary level, young people are channelled into horticulture if they are seen not to have science and technical leanings, but establishments seem to be unaware of just how far horticulture has developed and how much more technical and scientific it is now.”



Barriers to entering the sector present themselves at school level as the curriculum fails to promote greenkeeping and horticulture as career options



High-Legh Park Country Club



Kit Gregory, apprentice at St Anne's Old Links

Phil is on a wider mission to educate the educators. "Part of our task is to overturn the perception that greenkeepers, for example, are merely grasscutters. The reality, we know, is far different."

"This is such a huge area of opportunity and we have just scratched the surface," states Phil. "Most people have seen job advertisements and they have applied but not as a planned career - just something to fill in time until they find what they want to do."

One initiative the College has developed is working with a local secondary school, The Blue Coat School Oldham, to place students through the Practical Horticultural Skills Diploma.

"Pupils have a great chance to build their skills base in horticulture and move into a fulfilling role within the amenity sector, that they may not otherwise have considered as a career," he explains. "It's another route for

the College to engage with the community."

Apprentices have the opportunity to move right up to the top now, aided by a continuous programme of training, he says. "After completing Level 2, there's opportunities to progress to Level 3, then to the new Level 5 apprenticeship in Golf Course Management, currently available in England only, allowing aspiring head greenkeepers and deputy course managers to compete for top posts."

"By being in tune with apprenticeships, which form a key part of world work skills, we can help us compete globally, and greenkeeping is seen very much as a career opportunity overseas," he says.

"UK greenkeepers have sought and found careers abroad - in Europe, the US and Australia - and have become well-established and respected for the expertise they bring to golf clubs and other sports sites and venues."



Most people have seen job advertisements and they have applied but not as a planned career - just something to fill in time until they find what they want to do

Team culture

No man is an island though, and Phil was quick to realise the department's delivery depended on expanding resources. Right-hand man Nick Atkinson came on board two years ago and together they have developed a unified approach to their work-based training model.

"I worked with Nick at Myerscough. He has an outstanding knowledge of horticulture and dovetails well with me, as he knew Oldham Council's management style and had previous experience of working at Alexandra Park, so could respond to the council's needs and standards."

Phil and Nick take apprentices through a 24-month work-based programme, with an End Point Assessment (EPA) at the end of it.

Proof of their effectiveness for greenkeeping is revealed in the results for 2021. The stats speak for themselves - 70% distinction grade, 30% merit grade and overall 100% pass rate. "I'm so proud for the College and for our students," he adds. "The assessments results prove the quality of delivery we have here."

Star players

Kit Gregory, who is working at St Anne's Old Links Golf Course in Lytham St Anne's, passed his EPA with the Level 2 distinction that marks him out as a future greenkeeping star.

Formerly a kids' football coach, he wanted to try something different and had volunteered at Royal Lytham, cutting greens. "Greenkeeping is a great career change for me because I'm still outdoors and getting stuck in," he says. "I've learned about everything to do with greenkeeping. I thought, as an apprentice, I might be put to one side but that's not the case. I've been thrown in and constantly pushed forward to become the best greenkeeper possible."

Greg Wellings, course manager at St Anne's Old Links, is impressed with Kit's performance. "Kit has a mature head on his shoulders and has embraced all challenges. He's taken a real interest in greenkeeping,



St Anne's Old Links 10th green and clubhouse



I was absolutely delighted. Full credit must go to Craig for his work ethic and determination to pass the course, while gaining valuable knowledge and experience



Phil Lomas, left, standing beside Craig O'Donnell, with his boss, Steven Stringer at High Legh Golf Club

and it shows.”

“The club needs a multi-skilled, fully functioning workforce. Covering all areas on the apprenticeship is mutually beneficial. We’re training up future professionals and it keeps things fresh for the apprentice,” Greg explains.

He praises the College’s “flexible, rounded teaching and assessment”, adding: “Phil Lomas is very professional and we’re really pleased with the results. You just know your apprentices are going to do well with him.”

Kit’s apprenticeship has opened up a new world of possibilities. He’s planning to stay at the club short term but harbours ambitions to take higher-level qualifications and spend time working abroad.

Kit is one of three apprentices newly qualified through Oldham College as it develops a channel of proven success at one of Britain’s top courses, known as an Open Championship qualifying venue over several years.

Colleagues Ben Quinn and Alfie Williams have joined Kit in Old Links’ commitment to quality.

Huge relief

Craig O’Donnell, a Level 2 Golf Greenkeeping apprentice at High Legh Golf Club near Warrington, also passed his EPA with a distinction - another Oldham College ‘graduate’ who can apply the maintenance, care and management skills so vital to the sport.

[My result is] “a huge relief, because the worst bit is the waiting to find out how you’ve done,” he says.

Under the EPA, “you chose a hole and talked about everything to do with it - literally an A to Z,” he recalls. “At the start of the apprenticeship, I remember thinking how hard can it be, but had no idea greenkeeping was so detailed. You learn everything - soil types, grass types, maintenance and so much more,” he adds.

Teaching quality counted for Craig, a demobbed Army veteran in his mid-30s who

had served in Afghanistan but had no qualifications.

“The College’s apprenticeship worked for me because the course was taught well. Phil in particular takes the time to ensure learners fully understand everything that they are being shown.”

High Legh head greenkeeper Steven Stringer was thrilled with the results of the programme. “I was absolutely delighted. Full credit must go to Craig for his work ethic and determination to pass the course, while gaining valuable knowledge and experience.”

“In my opinion, Craig couldn’t have achieved this without Phil Lomas, his course tutor, whose knowledge and passion for the job are second to none in the industry.”

Steven’s “total faith” in Oldham’s level of delivery will translate into more High Legh staff passing through the college for their education requirements, he states.

Meanwhile, Craig is already weighing up his next move - an advanced apprenticeship Level 3 in Golf Greenkeeping - through Oldham College, which teed off on 26th November.

Eco leaning

Swelling the College’s new generation of aspiring greenkeepers is Michael Russell, who reached the final of the 2021 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards in September.

Ecology manager at Preston Golf Club, Michael, 29, was one of six in the final group, chosen from both 2020 and 2021 nominees (Covid postponed last year’s event).

Michael made a huge career jump by giving up his promising office-based career to train as a greenkeeper but “I don’t regret it at all”, he says.

Already holding a Sports Science degree, he warms to the education and learning side of work and credits his success on the Golf Greenkeeping apprenticeship to his “brilliant working relationship” with Phil, who comments:

“Michael has been an outstanding student throughout his apprenticeship with us and has completed a high standard of well-researched work, always displaying a high level of competence.”

Lockdown no limit

While lockdown witnessed a boom in homeowners tending their gardens, it also saw Oldham College horticulture apprentices carry on as normal.

Under the Council’s traineeship, Level 3 apprentices Kim Seddon and Mark Fitton had to adjust to the then ‘new normal’, however.

Due to lockdown restrictions, apprentices hadn’t been able to travel together which meant they’d been deployed carrying out maintenance work in different locations around the borough. “Their availability to continue working has been vital,” the council comments.

May 2020 was reportedly the then sunniest calendar month on record, which



Michael Russell



Apprentices cutting back in Alexandra Park



It's actually a relief to now have eighteen months to get the park looking its best, as opposed to rushing to get it all done in six

sent grass, flowers and trees blooming lavishly and making plenty of work for the team, including Kim and Mark.

Kim remains based at Oldham's flagship 23-hectare Alexandra Park whilst Mark temporarily switched to Limeside Park, a popular local recreational spot.

Both were able to continue working in their roles - Kim as an environmental operative and Mark as a Grade 1 gardener -

through social distancing.

Kim's main focus is Alexandra Park's herbaceous border, which Britain in Bloom judges had been due to inspect, until the prestigious annual event was postponed. However, Oldham has previously won a gold award, so expectations would have been high.

But in positive mood, she said at the time: "It's actually a relief to now have eighteen

months to get the park looking its best, as opposed to rushing to get it all done in six."

Before apprenticing, Kim volunteered at the former Brownhill Countryside Centre with the Countryside Service after graduating from the University of Salford.

"It was an invaluable experience," Kim says. "When the job at Alexandra Park came up, I knew plenty of people in this line of work and could get interview tips from them.

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I didn't know all the tools, their uses or many Latin terms but I was determined and I told them I'd learn."

Each apprentice also receives specific projects to focus on and hone their skills. Mark assisted with the flagging and landscaping of the Northern Roots show garden ahead of intended submission to the 2021 Hampton Court Flower Festival.

Kim's main focus - redesigning two of Alexandra Park's flower beds - was initially on hold, as the nursery she sourced flowers from had to close, but since reopening, the project is progressing, but just a little later than planned

Oldham College assessed Kim and Mark's work throughout the year. Photos recorded the changing of the seasons, and the pairs' written-up actions helped them develop proof of a body of work they can be proud of now they have completed their Level 3 apprenticeships, Phil says.

Tutor and assessor Nick Atkinson is full of praise. "We're really proud of their commitment to carry on working and learning during the pandemic," he says.

"Kim has been completing her Level 3



Mark was really keen to progress on to his Level 3 course and has been involved with numerous grounds maintenance projects, including the impressive show garden



Alexandra Park

work-based Diploma in Horticulture course for more than 10 months and is demonstrating a real passion and enthusiasm to gain more knowledge and understanding of the subject. Alexandra Park is an excellent horticultural facility that allows her to gather all the relevant project evidence to complete the qualification."

Nick adds: "The same is true for Mark, who, like Kim, had also previously completed his Level 1 and 2 horticultural qualifications with Oldham College whilst working for Oldham Council."

"Mark was really keen to progress on to his Level 3 course and has been involved with numerous grounds maintenance

projects, including the impressive show garden."

Rosy future

Returning to golf, Phil is upbeat about the future. "The sport has a huge opportunity to progress," he predicts, but his interest extends still broader; he is active in developing further opportunities for the College, "to help ensure it grows at the right pace", he says. "We now deliver pesticide application and chainsaw short courses, whilst, under the department's plan for expansion, client targets include attracting more councils, golf clubs, football clubs and private landscapers."



Mark Fitton



Kim Seddon laying turf



When the job at Alexandra Park came up, I knew plenty of people in this line of work and could get interview tips from them

“We have just started delivering Level 2 Sportsturf Operative Apprenticeship for those working for football clubs.”

“Demand for training is constant,” Phil confirms. “We always seek opportunities for the College to engage more deeply with sport and amenity providers, both locally and regionally. It’s important to us that we’ve grown organically, supported by strong community links and the reputation we’ve built.”

More than 150 apprentices - from a catchment as far flung as Derby (Kedleston

Park Golf Club) to Prestbury, Wilmslow and Manchester golf clubs and Lytham St Annes (Old Links) - have passed through the department since its inception and expansion means even more to come.

Links with four Greater Manchester authorities have led to the College providing a mix of training solutions.

With 6,500 learners and staff, Oldham College is an achieving educational hub, ranking second in Greater Manchester for apprenticeship achievement rates for 2020/21 (source: DfE and Education & Skills

Funding Agency), TES FE award finalists for College of the Year 2020 and Outstanding use of technology in delivering remote teaching and learning (2021).

As a thriving entity within its delivery structure, the Horticulture and Greenkeeping department is sending a clear message that Oldham means business.

The Northern Roots initiative, for example, will provide major opportunities to deliver training in both apprenticeships and in short courses such as chainsaw, because of the tree population on such an extensive site.

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Some of the course managers and head greenkeepers Phil knows completed their apprenticeships under him as far back as twenty years ago



Apprentices working at Alexandra Park

Secrets of success

- Phil's longstanding reputation for delivering training
- Prides himself on quality
- Well connected. Some of the course managers and head greenkeepers Phil knows completed their apprenticeships under him as far back as twenty years ago
- Land-based trainer serving the local community
- Passionate training provider, determined to value every apprentice and ensure a quality experience for each one
- Understands both sides of the industry - as a tutor and an EPA assessor - so can tell apprentices all about what they can expect out in the field, as Phil and Nick are independent end-point assessors for City & Guilds and Lantra



The Peak District National Park is around a quarter of the borough's footprint and there are picturesque villages, outdoor countryside centres, three nature reserves, play spaces, historic canals and waterways, woodlands, wildflower meadows and thirty-two parks

A word about Oldham

"If you live or work in Oldham you are fortunate, the town's publicity claims. "No doorstep in this borough, and that includes our own campus, is more than two miles away from glorious open countryside."

"The Peak District National Park is around a quarter of the borough's footprint and there are picturesque villages such as Saddleworth, outdoor countryside centres, three nature reserves, play spaces, historic canals and waterways, woodlands, wildflower meadows and thirty-two parks."

The council won the 2019 gold award for North West Britain in Bloom (BIB) and Best Town Centre BIB award. "Our apprentices were heavily involved in preparing and maintaining the horticultural areas throughout the borough."

The 1969 moon landing inspired the town centre's iconic garden.



Oldham College



Kim Seddon working in Alexandra Park

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With the Government bringing forward its plan to transition to zero-emission cars and vans by five years to 2035, the move to cleaner energy across all industries is not a case of if, but when.

The benefits of investing in electric vehicles far outweigh the negatives. So why are consumers still hesitant to make the move? And why are manufacturers still producing ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles? It comes down to one thing: range anxiety.

What is range anxiety?

Range anxiety is a term recently added to the Oxford English dictionary and is currently defined as the 'worry on the part of a person driving an electric car that the battery will run out of power before the destination or a

suitable charging point is reached'.

'Range' is the word used to describe the total distance an electric vehicle can travel with its available battery power, and it differs between various EV manufacturers and models. Elevation, weather, traffic and, most importantly, driving speed also influence the range an EV can achieve.

What causes range anxiety?

Range anxiety is more of a psychological issue than an actual concern EV drivers should have (the data speaks for itself in this regard) and is widely associated with driving an electric car, but is there actually cause for concern?

In the UK, the average person drives around 20 miles per day¹ - far below the range of the lowest-performing EV model available in the UK (the Smart EQ 44 at 59 miles²). And, when

we look at the current median range of most EVs, the numbers are even more impressive - 193 miles, which is nine times more than the average driver needs on a daily basis. Not to mention the ranges for EVs continue to increase year after year.

Even though range anxiety could very well have been a valid concern in the early days of EV production and distribution, we have come a long way to breaking down the myths.

Why is range anxiety so important to tackle?

Range anxiety has been coined as the number one reason ICE drivers are not making the change - it has been mentioned substantially more than high prices or any other factor in a study conducted by J.D. Power this year.

Range Anxiety

Fact or fiction?

In this article, **Dave French**, sales manager at Reesink e-Vehicles, explains the issue, dispels the myths when it comes to electric vehicles and provides all the reassurance you need to be ready for the inevitable transition to cleaner, greener machinery options

With range anxiety playing such a big role in the consumers' and businesses' decisions, it becomes obvious why, despite the growing government regulations and technological advances, most vehicles are still sold with a combustion engine. It's a real environmental issue and it needs to be urgently addressed. Here's why:

Since 1970, carbon dioxide emissions have risen rapidly. Transportation accounts for 21 percent of worldwide CO2 emissions and is the largest contributing sector in the UK, producing 27 percent of the country's total GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions. A staggering 35 percent of NOX (Nitrogen Oxides) emissions and 13 percent of PM2.5 (Particulate Matter) emissions in 2019 came from transport, whilst 12 percent of NOX emissions came from cars alone, with cars emitting more GHGs per passenger mile than

trains and coaches that carry more people³.

EVs have zero tailpipe emissions which, coupled with their superior energy efficiency, over time reduces their actual pollution percentage considerably when compared to ICE vehicles. This makes them the more sustainable choice by far, especially in countries using renewable energies in their manufacturing process.

And it's not just road vehicles: if you're managing a golf course or sports pitch that require the use of utility vehicles to move staff, guests and materials, you can count on great environmentally-friendly options as well. STAR EV is one of the leading electric utility and passenger vehicle distributors in the world and it has recently entered the UK market under Reesink e-Vehicles with its lithium-ion batteries. These are not only

maintenance-free and produce zero emissions but are also safe and cost less to own than lead-acid batteries whilst lasting three to four times as long.

As far as range concerns, STAR EV's smallest models start with lithium options offering 20-30 miles, with the largest people-carriers and load carriers covering as far as 70-80 miles in one single charge - more than enough to make sure most daily tasks are taken care of without interruption.

But, if exposing the data isn't enough, here are the top ways you can prevent range anxiety:

How to prevent range anxiety

One simple way to avoid range anxiety is to charge the vehicle at home or at work overnight, having it ready to go the very next morning. Of the electric vehicles distributed

With the Government bringing forward its plan to transition to zero emission cars and vans, electric power will soon affect all vehicles in all industries



Letting a psychological component like range anxiety massively undermine the worldwide efforts made so far in the path towards sustainability is not an option



EVs save on costs over time, help with climate change and improve the driver's overall driving experience



Lithium-ion batteries don't need to be fully charged to operate the vehicle or to be fully drained to be recharged

via Reesink, such as the Farmtrac electric tractor and STAR EV vehicles, you don't even need to make any changes to your current electrical system: all models can be fast charged by plugging into any standard household outlet, taking between three to ten hours (depending on the model) for a full charge.

Moreover, Star EV's on-board charging and lithium-ion batteries allow you to plug into any 13A or 16A socket at any time to top up the battery if required. So, if the team are back for a lunch break, they can plug in and add extra range whilst they are having a sandwich, giving peace of mind for the afternoon operations.

Another way you can reduce range anxiety is to benefit from reliable and user-friendly phone apps and in-dash navigation systems. STAR EV's battery status, for instance, can be monitored live through a mobile app for added reassurance.

The mass production of higher-capacity batteries will also ensure drivers are able to enjoy the already much more fun, comfortable and hassle-free experience of driving an EV (according to the NewMotion EV Driver Survey conducted this year) without having to worry about whether they will run out of battery, even if they don't actually need the extra range.

Overall, it's important to remember that lithium-ion batteries don't need to be fully charged to operate the vehicle. And they also don't need to be fully drained to be recharged. STAR EV's lithium batteries, for instance, can operate on 100 percent full power until discharge with no decline in performance, which grants maximum productivity for any work required.

Positives of range anxiety

Despite all the negativity surrounding range anxiety, the reality is that it has produced some positive results.

The EV demand has forced manufacturers and governments worldwide to cater to the consumers' requests, prompting technological advancements and providing even more support for the environmental shift.

The need for longer range batteries and fast-charging stations, amongst other factors, were quickly addressed to increase mass EV adoption and both public and private investments were directed towards clean vehicles.

Not only that, manufacturers took it upon themselves to analyse the existing data provided by the drivers and their vehicles to further enhance their products and provide the absolute best service possible. As an example, they were able to start pre-conditioning the battery to achieve the optimal temperature for charging upon arrival, improving charging speed.

It's also been proven, in the car industry, that range anxiety makes drivers drive more cautiously, not only by reducing their overall speed but keeping it constant and avoiding sharp braking or harsh acceleration, all in order to conserve as much energy as possible.

So, it seems that, compared to ICE vehicles, not only do EVs save on costs over time and help with climate change, but they also improve the driver's overall driving experience.

Conclusion

We are fighting a race against time to save an increasingly dying Earth. By using all the tools currently at our disposal to fight climate change, which include the use of EVs in our daily lives as opposed to heavily polluting ICE vehicles, we find ourselves in a position to reclaim a greener world for future generations.



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Letting a psychological component like range anxiety massively undermine the worldwide efforts made so far in the path towards sustainability is not an option. It's imperative that we tackle any factors influencing consumers' decision to adopt EVs based on unfounded fears and range anxiety is number one on the list.

As EV and battery technology continues to advance, more and more long-range EVs will be produced, reducing the stress of long trips. Alongside this, the ease and speed at which you can operate and charge your EV is growing to the point where one day, hopefully, range anxiety will become a thing of the past.

According to a study by the American Automobile Association, the cure to range anxiety is owning an electric vehicle - so make sure to keep an eye out for your next EV acquisition and join the ranks of every satisfied driver to date, with the added bonus of helping to save the planet.

Sources:

- 1 - NimbleFins
- 2 - Electric Vehicle Database
- 3 - Department for Transport

Reesink brings to the UK the industry's first all-electric riding greensmower from Toro, as well as the industry's first all-electric tractor from Farmtrac. It also has a comprehensive and extensive range of battery-powered golf buggies, passenger buggies, and commercial and utility vehicles from STAR

EV. For further information on making the step into battery-powered machinery for your venue, contact Reesink online, by phone on 01480 226800 or by email at info@reesinkturfcare.co.uk.



Dave French, sales manager at Reesink e-Vehicles



Electric-powered vehicles - the myths versus the facts

MYTH: There are not enough charging stations and electric vehicles have a limited range.

FACT: Charging stations are being added to the infrastructure every day and will one day be as common as petrol stations. 50kW charger adds 100 miles in around 35 minutes. Batteries don't need to be fully charged to operate the vehicle, nor do they need to be fully drained to be recharged.

MYTH: Electric vehicles are more expensive than petrol-powered vehicles.

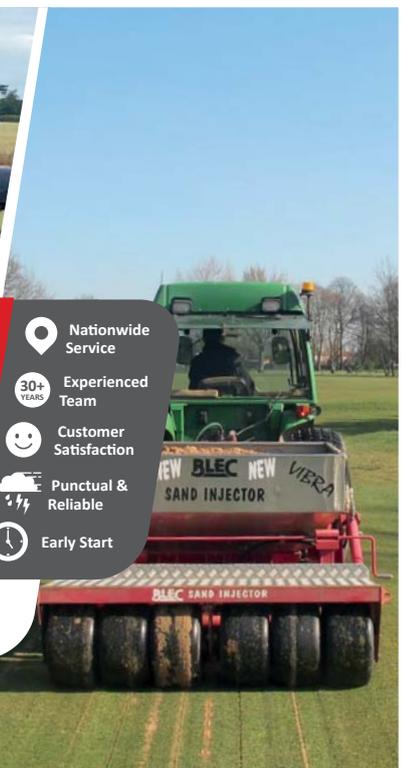
FACT: The upfront cost is higher (but dropping fast) yet lower fuel and maintenance costs mean operation is much more cost-effective.

MYTH: Petrol-powered vehicles will never be replaced by electric vehicles.

FACT: Government is bringing forward its plan to transition to zero-emission cars and vans by five years to 2035.

MYTH: Electric vehicle demand exceeds the electrical grid's current capacity.

FACT: Switching to electric overnight would only increase demand by ten percent, fitting comfortably within the grid's capacity.



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Ride-on Mowers

Nimble numbers on the turf

There's a plethora of ride-on mowers on the market which can make purchasing a complex process. In this article we talk to **Phil Catley**, Key Account and Product Manager at Kubota to get some pointers on choosing the right ride-on when space is tight and look at some examples of how the company's machines are solving grounds management challenges



Phil Catley, Kubota Key Account and Product Manager

Ride-on mowers come in a vast range of shapes and sizes and a contractor or grounds maintenance manager may have several machines from different manufacturers, the same manufacturer or even different sizes of the same machine for one venue.

Choosing the right machine comes down to a number of factors, suggests Kubota's Key Account and Product Manager, Phil Catley.

"Whether specifying machines for a new contract or facility or upgrading an existing fleet, consider what your priorities are for

grasscutting. How many cuts per season will you make and thus how long will the grass be when you come to tackle it? How important is finish or is output more of a priority?"

Modern rotary decks can provide a high-quality finish at a variety of cut heights and work in long or wet grass, he points out.

Formal areas, caravan parks and housing contracts are examples of the type of job that requires grass collection, for an enhanced appearance and to prevent clippings being carried indoors.

"Collector mowers need to be effective, high in capacity and convenient," comments



Phil. "On our compact G21E, for example, the three-bladed deck works with the Glide Cut system which allows additional air to be processed, helping with effective collection."

"When we updated our popular G-series mower, particular attention was made to making the discharge chute taller and wider for reliable collection in all conditions. The twin blade cutting system gives a smooth, continuous flow of grass which further enhances efficient collection."

Delivery of power to the mower deck is also important, he points out, with an electromagnetic PTO clutch replacing a hydraulic PTO on the G series, giving a more



Front mowers offer high outputs but can also use their rear-wheel steering to manoeuvre around obstacles

positive drive for consistent cutting in all conditions.

“We also offer high tip and low dump options depending on whether the requirement is to tip into a trailer or onto a heap. For a contractor, being able to take the clippings away can be a strong selling point.”

Platform Housing Group runs a wide range of Kubota mowers for different locations, but for challenging work on general use sites, cut and collect and a high level of manoeuvrability are key, so the Kubota G261 fits the bill precisely.

Service manager Simon Harris comments: “The latest machines offer extra productivity

and quality. The G261 has replaced a G23 in the fleet, and as well as the wider deck we are getting a better cut, while the flow of material from the deck to the cut is more streamlined. We’ve also noticed that with the adoption of the latest engine technology, the mowers have a better transmission of power.”

Many jobs will include cutting in some sort of restricted area, which points to the use of a ride-on rather than a tractor mower. But as well as considering the size of the area and its access, there may be obstacles to negotiate from low branches to playground furniture and flower beds.

A small ride-on can also be a great back up to a tractor mounted or wide area mower, as Thirsk Racecourse has found with Kubota’s GR2120. Head groundsman Steve Kelsey explains:

“The GR2120 is used to cut along the rail where we can’t get a big machine but still need an efficient mowing solution,” he explains. “We also use it for areas such as enclosures and lawns where we need a good finish.”

The GR2120 features Kubota’s Glide Steer system for manoeuvrability, which cuts power automatically to the inside rear wheel when the turning angle reaches 70 degrees.



A ride-on collector mower works well for general use sites where it is needed to mow close to buildings



A small ride-on can be a great asset to back up a tractor mower and where a high standard of presentation is required

By allowing the inner wheel to spin freely while the outer wheel powers the mower through its turn, damage to the grass is avoided while the mower continues cutting tightly around trees, posts and other obstacles.

“A compact machine can be highly productive where there are lots of obstacles and narrow access, and if you don’t need collection, a rear discharge/mulching mower such as the new Kubota G261 RD could be ideal,” comments Phil Catley.

A smaller machine need not mean sacrificing output - the G series has a travel speed of up to 19kph, so it is much swifter to move between grass areas.

Then there’s the choice between zero turn and steering wheel machines - an out-front is the ultimate for output and offers a great view of the deck while still being very manoeuvrable with its rear wheel steer, but a zero turn can spin within its own length in really tight spots.

Equestrian venue Keysoe International is one of the first to use Kubota’s latest generation of front mower, the F251, as Grounds Manager Bob Richardson explains:

“There are large open grass areas which are cut with a tractor mounted mower, but we also have 150 cross-country jumps, 200 trees and three man-made lakes - which serve as water jumps - to mow around.”

“We wanted ride-on mowers to cut these areas efficiently while encouraging a good sward which makes for safe, inviting footing for the horses,” he adds.

“We run both machines together and get fantastic workrates,” explains Bob. “We’ve used them in all conditions - they went through some overgrown paddocks with ease, where our other mowers had struggled, and they are stable enough to use on the bunds around competition arenas. The cross-country facilities are open from March to October so we need to be able to cut long, wet grass.”

The F251 combines the latest stage V engine with a highly efficient two-range HST transmission and on demand 4WD to perform in demanding conditions, and the design is proven in heavy commercial use.

Height of cut is another consideration. Contractors and larger sites such as parks and hotels may need to cut at heights from

10cm on open spaces in the spring to 4-5cm on formal lawns. It can be an advantage to have a mower that cuts well at different heights and is easy to change, as Farnham Estates’ Golf and Estate Manager Barry Smith points out:

“We have a traditional commercial rotary ride-on, but we need to cut at a number of different heights ranging from hotel lawns to lake surrounds, and swapping between them is a lengthy task on that machine. On Kubota’s ZD 1211 zero turn, you simply lift the deck, choose the required height on a dial next to the driver’s seat and away you go.”

On other designs, such as the F series front mowers, height of cut can be adjusted by simply selecting the required position on the caster wheel axle. These mowers are also a good option for all year-use as the deck can be easily swapped to a flail for rough cutting or a brush for leaf or snow clearance, suggests Phil.



Ease of altering cut height is a point to look out for when choosing a mower if it is needed to tackle both longer grass and high presentation areas



A mulching mower that can access tight areas can offer a combination of high workrates and manoeuvrability

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Frank Newberry

Will You Beat the Sifter?



Will you beat the sifter? The CV Sifter. Can your CV carry you through to an interview for a great job? Maybe you are looking right now for your first full time job, or maybe you are hoping for a new job elsewhere? Whether you are looking or not - it might be wise to locate your current CV to see if it needs updating - just in case a good opportunity arises, and your CV has to beat the sifter.

In this article, Trainer and Careers Counsellor **Frank Newberry** offers some useful tips on what to include in your CV as well as how it can be configured to give you a better chance of getting the job interview you want.

Read on for details of how to get free sample CVs to help you get your CV just right!

My view, over the years, has not changed. The job of the CV (Curriculum Vitae or Resume) is to get you a job interview. Simple as that. Whereas the job of the CV sifter (who may know nothing about turfcare practices and skills) is to make sure that the interviewers see only those people the employer thinks are the most suitable.

The reality is that there could be eighty or more applicants chasing the vacancy you want, and the CV sifter may have been told to sift through them all and get the number down to just ten applicants for interview. Some employers only want to do four final interviews.

The CV sifter spends just twenty seconds reading each CV

The CV sifter begins by reading at least part of each of the eighty CVs in order to weed out the less suitable candidates. The employer will have set the sifting criteria to be followed, e.g. only select people with the same rank as the vacancy for interview, or only those with certain qualifications, or only people with a certain number of years' experience etc.

This first paper sift is often done at very high speed. It has been said to me many times over the years that, when there are a lot of applications, the sifter will spend on average just twenty seconds reading each CV.

Your goal, at this point, is to get past this first sift. You can do this by giving a good impression of your suitability in the first half page of the CV. That done, the next goal is to get the sifter to put your CV onto the small pile of CVs whose owners will get an interview.



Many busy employers make speedy hiring decisions. This quick decision is usually based on getting a good early impression from a CV. This makes the first third of the first page of a CV a key area as far as appeal is concerned

The CVs of the unlucky ones who did not pass that 'good first impression' test could then be placed on the 'reject' pile - after just twenty seconds reading! It gets worse. The interviewers themselves might not even read the rest of our CV until just before the interview.

Standard CVs used to be convenient and popular

Let us look at your two main options: a standard CV or a Customised CV? Standard CVs used to be convenient and popular in the days when most people did not have access to laptops, PCs and printers.

Convenient that is, if you did the same work year after year and only changed your CV when:

1. your existing job changed (and perhaps you had to be retrained)
2. you moved to another department
3. you changed to another employer, or
4. you got promoted internally - out of your existing job

The aim of the standard CV was to be a true and accurate record of your employment and work experience.

When you applied for a job, the practice was to send out a CV with a cover letter that drew the reader's attention to the skills you have that matched those wanted by the prospective employer. The CV stayed mainly the same; it was the Cover Letter that changed with each job application.

This approach made sense if you have a really impressive CV and the jobs you applied for were generally of the same type.

However, with so much flexibility and sometimes turmoil in the job market these days, this approach is somewhat out of date. A concern about standard CVs would be that your rivals for a vacancy could be getting more interviews than you by closely matching the content of their CVs to every vacancy for which they apply.

Rather than making the prospective employer search through the document for the relevant facts - the customised CV places all the essential information employers need on the first half page. Employers will not search through the long documents when they have 80 or more of them to read.

Customised CVs

A 'customised CV', with all the information about your suitability in the first two paragraphs, will dramatically increase your

chances of being interviewed.

That said, you will still have to write a covering letter, so you may consider reproducing parts of the suitability or 'profile' paragraph of your CV in the letter itself (see the customised CV layout below).

You can get sample CVs from me on request. Just click on the Contact tab at www.franknewberry.com and then complete the 'request information' box and send it off. Please take a moment to include your current job level, i.e. Groundsman, Supervisor, Head Greenkeeper etc.

You will not be able to write a meaningful CV if you do not know what employers are really looking for in their ideal candidate. If the job advertisement doesn't tell you much, then call the employer and ask politely for a copy of the 'job description' and the 'employee specification'. They will almost certainly have a job description for the vacancy, but they may not have an employee specification.

The job description will tell you what the job involves, and the employee specification will tell you the type of person the employer sees as the ideal candidate. Armed with that information, you can write a cover letter and CV that should fit the vacancy perfectly. And this is the drawback of the customised CV. They take a while to write, and you will probably have to change them with every vacancy. My view is that they are worth your time and trouble.

The first third of the first page of a customised CV

1. Many busy employers make speedy hiring decisions. This quick decision is usually based on getting a good early impression from a CV. This makes the first third of the first page of a CV a key area as far as appeal is concerned
2. I recommend you put your energy into getting a really positive career profile (suitability statement) at

the top of your CV, so that employers do not have to search for very long for the information they need

3. Just one short paragraph that summarises your key skills, experience and disposition in positive (not modest) language will draw the eye of the employer, who can always look further down the CV for more detail

The Customised CV Logical Sequence

As previously mentioned, sample CVs are available from me via my website. They are based on real CVs used by people in our sector. They contain positive phrases and statements that could enhance your CV.

1. Begin the document with the words 'CURRICULUM VITAE' in large print
2. Just beneath the heading 'Curriculum Vitae' write your name, address, contact numbers and perhaps a flattering photo of you, then the following sequence:
3. Profile (a suitability statement/pen picture of you)
4. Achievements (specific work achievements linked to the requirements of the job vacancy)
5. Employment History with duties, responsibilities and dates - going back a maximum of 10 years. If you have something great to say about yourself from over 10 years ago - put it under 'Achievements' (see 4 above)
6. Vocational Educational Qualifications, e.g. NVQs
7. Relevant vocational and technical training
8. Licences, certificates and accreditations etc.
9. Hobbies, pastimes and family details

Remember, your customised CV can be created from scratch, or an existing one can be reconfigured. It can really super-charge your career. So good luck beating the sifter in order to get that great job!

For now - stay safe - until we meet again in these pages.

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Getting Personal

Frank Newberry - we always had him down as a dead ringer for The Rock!

Who are you? Frank Newberry: Careers Coach, Sales and Management Trainer.

Family status? Married, three children and seven grandchildren.

Who's your hero and why? My customers and clients because they are trying to continuously improve.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Watching my clients go on to get top jobs they never dreamed they would get.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? Wow! You got a job you never dreamed you would get.

Which famous people wind you up? 'Professional' cockneys like Dom Littlewood and Danny Dyer. I lived in the East End of London for eleven years and these stereotypes are not helpful.

What job would you love, other than your own? Can't think of anything I have loved more than my present job.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? I am way too shameless to be embarrassed!

What is your favourite film? The Philadelphia Story (1940). Clever, cool and very funny.

What scares you? COVID 19.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? 'Fun with Frank' starring Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson - who else?

What is your favourite sport? Grand Sumo. Catch it on NHK World (Sky Channel 507) every two months.

What would you cast into Room 101? Professional wrestling, homelessness, big tattoos on faces.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? The UK in 100 years' time.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? That anyone can help change things for the better - at any time of life.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Paternal grandfather who died in World War I in his twenties



and any two people in history he cared to invite.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? Our memories are perfect - it is our recall systems that are crap.

What's your favourite smell? My wife.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Sergeant Pepper by The Beatles, Hotel California by the Eagles and Labour of Love by UB40.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? At the end of the seminar will you tell the grounds and greens teams that we are switching to all-night working from next month? I didn't!

What's your favourite piece of kit? My slide projector.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Arrogant, Aggressive, Incorrigible - all words used by others to describe me at one time or another over the years.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson/greenkeeper? You're going to be great at your job!

What talent would you like to have? Speak other languages well - especially Japanese and Chinese.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Laws related to littering to be enforced with massive fines and community service - like litter picking for weeks on end.

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OFFSIDE

The not so serious side of the industry

Come on Eileen

Eileen Ash was, until early December, the oldest living England Test cricketer. In a somewhat unremarkable career, interrupted by World War II, she rarely troubled the scores, but came to prominence very late in life. During the war she worked for MI6!

Eileen was a special guest at the Women's World Cup final at Lord's in 2017, being asked to ring the five-minute pavilion bell



on the day that Heather Knight's England side lifted the trophy. She was drinking champagne in the MCC president's box and flirting with John Major for much of the match!

Later that year, Eileen appeared on the ITV show 100-Year-Old Driving School after purchasing a brand new red Mini on her 90th birthday - and was taken up in a Tiger Moth with Sky Sports to mark her 106th birthday. Two years later, she was back at Lord's for the unveiling of a portrait of her.

And the secret to her longevity? "As long as you can keep breathing, you're OK."

Spidercam forces early Tea

In a bizarre incident on Day 3, it was the spidercam that forced umpires to take an early Tea in the second Test at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday.

The incident happened when R Ashwin trapped New Zealand skipper Tom Latham. The spidercam, which had come down, was stuck close to the pitch and forced an early break - about 15 minutes early.

However, the groundsmen got it moving



slowly during the break. One of the four strings on which it was suspended had gone limp. Later on, it was pulled pretty high and play resumed on time after the Tea break.

Pigs injure golfer and force closure

A pair of roaming pigs injured two men and forced the closure of Lightcliffe Golf Club when they stormed the course.



Two runaway porkers, thought to be Vietnamese Pot-bellied pigs, hurt the golfer and the greens director and were seen pushing golf trolleys and bags over.

Police eventually took the animals away after they moved to a nearby road and disrupted traffic; however, they returned to the course two days later.

"We had to close because they were wandering around and took over the course," Ms Crowther said. "They ended up outside the clubhouse on the ninth green and didn't seem to want to go away."

As seen on social media ...



The floodlights stopped working in the Marine vs. Dunston match recently, but luckily a Dunston midfielder is an electrician and he sorted it... I'm glad there was a pint waiting for him too!



That will make goal line technology tricky!



A greenkeeper at Golf Park Steinhuder Meer recently found this whilst he was looking for a lost valve box.



Heybridge Gardens FC
@HeybridgeFC



U18s need a keeper for 45 min on Saturday. The boundary restriction on Scott's electronic bracelet only covers him for one half of the pitch

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"It started a couple of years ago. I like to pick a lucky toilet at away games. If there are three cubicles and somebody is in my one, I have to wait. Sometimes I'll move people across and say, 'Get out of there' even though others are empty." **Brighton's Shane Duffy revealed one of the most bizarre superstitions in football - his lucky toilet.**

"He has an aura. Many of the current Australia team were in Leeds and they will have the memories. It will only take him to look even slightly dangerous and they will start wondering what he is capable of doing. That is what happens when a player has a reputation and has gained the respect of the opposition." **Australia coach Justin Langer says he has nightmares about what Ben Stokes achieved at Headingley two years ago.**

"Leicester squeeze you to death so you only get one or two opportunities in a game. Our performance was strong enough, probably near our best, but it wasn't good enough." **Harlequins head coach Tabai Matson rued his side's wasted opportunities as they missed the chance to inflict a first defeat of the season on league leaders Leicester.**



Shane Duffy

"How much money did they give you son of a b***hes? The level of match fixing in Columbia is sad, but this is hilariously sad." **There have been calls for a match-fixing investigation after Unión Magdalena were promoted in suspicious fashion in Colombia courtesy of two stoppage time goals.**

"It feels amazing but I am more happy for the team than for myself. It is never easy to come at the end of the season but it was the best two weeks of my career." **World number two Daniil Medvedev celebrated as he led the Russian Tennis Federation to a third Davis Cup title.**

"Sometimes maybe good, sometimes maybe shit." **A video recently went viral of Greek soccer club OFI Crete manager Gennaro Gattuso describing his team's performance.**

"What an absolutely pathetic display of spirit of the game by Warner! Shameful! Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting talk a lot about sportsmanship, let's see what they have to say about this. It's easy to criticise people but difficult when it's your own players." **Former India batter Gautam Gambhir accused David Warner of 'stealing runs' during Australia's T20 World Cup semi-final victory over Pakistan.**

DIARY DATES

JANUARY

1st: Happy New Year

5th-9th: Cricket - The Ashes 4th Test, Australia vs England, Sydney (icc-cricket.com)

9th-6th Feb: Football - Africa Cup of Nations 2022, Cameroon (cafonline.com)

13th-26th Mar: Horseracing - 2022 Dubai World Cup Carnival, Dubai (dubairacingclub.com)

14th-18th: Cricket - The Ashes 4th Test, Australia vs England, TBC (icc-cricket.com)

17th-30th: Tennis - Australia Open Melbourne, Australia (ausopen.com)

22nd-30th: Cricket - T20 series, West Indies v England, Kensington Oval, Barbados (icc-cricket.com)

25th-27th: Industry - BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition 2022, Harrogate Convention Centre (btme.org.uk)

FEBRUARY

1st-3rd: Industry - Ernest Doe Show, Maldon Essex (ernestdoe.com)

Rugby - Six Nations round one

5th: Ireland vs. Wales (Aviva Stadium, Dublin)

Scotland vs. England (BT Murrayfield Stadium)

6th: Rugby - France vs. Italy (Stade de France, Paris)

Rugby - Six Nations round two

12th: Wales vs. Scotland (Principality Stadium, Cardiff)

France vs. Ireland (Stade de France, Paris)

13th: Rugby - Italy vs. England (Stadio Olimpico, Rome)

Rugby - Six Nations round three

26th: Scotland vs. France (BT Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh)

England vs. Wales (Twickenham Stadium, London)

27th: Ireland vs. Italy (Aviva Stadium, Dublin) (six-nations-guide.co.uk/2022)

27th Feb: Football - EFL Carabao Cup final, Wembley Stadium (efl.com/carabao-cup)

MARCH

4th-3rd April: Cricket - 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup, New Zealand (icc-cricket.com)

5th: Horseracing - Coral Spring Cup, Lingfield Park, Surrey (lingfieldpark.co.uk)

8th-31st: Cricket - West Indies v England Test Series (icc-cricket.com)

10th-13th: Golf - The Players Championship, TPC Sawgrass, Florida (theplayers.com)

Rugby - Six Nations round four

11th: Wales vs. France (Principality Stadium, Cardiff)

12th: Rugby - Italy vs. Scotland (Stadio Olimpico, Rome)

England vs. Ireland (Twickenham Stadium, London)

(six-nations-guide.co.uk/2022)

15th-18th: Horseracing - 2022 Cheltenham Festival (thejockeyclub)

Rugby - Six Nations round five

19th: Wales vs. Italy (Principality Stadium, Cardiff)

Ireland vs. Scotland (Aviva Stadium, Dublin)

France vs. England (Stade de France, Paris)

(six-nations-guide.co.uk/2022)

31st-3rd April: Golf - 2022 Chevron Women's Golf major Championship (thechevronchampionship)

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