

# PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from [pitchcare.com](http://pitchcare.com)

December/January 2019

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## DON'T MISS

Life behind bars. How training is helping offenders back into the community



## IT'S FERGIE TIME!

When FIFA were looking for an experienced groundsman to undertake the newly created position of Senior Pitch Management Manager, they needed to look no further than **Alan Ferguson**. In this exclusive interview, the genial Scot explains what his role will involve heading up to the 2022 Qatar World Cup

## PLUS



## GROUNDS TRAINING

The go-to training provider for the turfcare industry

## The North West Powerhouse

The North West of England is home to five top flight teams. But what is life like for the region's lower league groundsmen who can only dream of the extensive budgets available to their lofty neighbours? Lee Williams visits four such clubs to find out

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WELCOME TO

# PITCHCARE

## Political ponderings

**In my last foreword, there was mention of Epsom Racecourse losing a day of racing due to a chafer infestation. Contrary to what the course put out for general consumption, they had indeed been using the emergency approved Acelepryn to curb the problem. Unfortunately, it didn't work as well as had been hoped, but we would like to apologise to the Clerk of the Course and the groundstaff, who undoubtedly worked around the clock to try and get the meeting on.**

But it does highlight the constant fight that we all now face with the lack of good controls available to stave off pests and diseases.

By the time you read this, the House of Commons will have voted on the Brexit deal. Forgetting the claims and scaremongering made by both leave and remain in the run up to the referendum - such as £350m that would go into bolstering our NHS, house prices will plummet and unemployment will soar - most people that I have spoken to about leaving wanted decision making and sovereignty returned to our shores.

From an industry perspective, the legislation that has affected the widespread revocation of chemicals is now decimating our ability to do our jobs properly. We clamour to look at the alternatives, and there is indeed merit in producing a balanced soil food web that, in turn, keeps a healthy strong sward more resistant to disease. Hopefully, we will have some new additions to our armoury for pest control in the near future.

With the financial and political strains of life continuing, we could have hoped for a better year of weather, but for 2018 this was sadly against us too. The cold and wet winter, followed by a late and short spring that became a long dry summer, created many problems for us all and, for many of us, it will be next

spring before we can aim to be back on track.

There is much debate (G20) about trying to halt the acceleration of global warming and plenty of predictions to our future weather patterns, that potentially could become devastating to parts of our planet. With a growing global population that needs to eat, leading to increasing livestock and methane and the deforestation of the planet for growing crops, we also have large emerging industrial nations (India and China) adding substantial CO2 emissions. Are we actually going to be able to stop and/or reverse this trend?

Regardless of whether it's possible, we will have to adapt, for sure, if the predictions are correct, and deal with more extreme weather going forward.

For the last fifteen years, we have seen a migration northward of pests, such as chafers, reaching Scotland as the climate becomes milder. The fact remains that the evidence shows we are going to enjoy warmer, drier summers and wetter winters, and that means there will be more pests and diseases that we will have to come to terms with.

However, despite these rather depressing thoughts, I hope you all had a fantastic Christmas and I wish you the very best for 2019.

**Cheers,  
Dave Saltman**



## SAY THAT AGAIN!

*"I know of non-league lower level clubs that have had a grant, gone out and bought a tractor or a cutting machine, but don't know how to look after them"*

Nick Wild, Curzon Aston FC

*"I keep reminding my colleagues to take a step back every so often and think how lucky we are to work in such an environment"*

Lee Keeler, Benenden School

*"We are an up-and-coming nation on the golf and greenkeeping scene, whereas England has always been a leader in the industry, but the employees are being left behind due to lack of support and resources"*

Andrew Dudge, Søllerød Golfklub

*"Why do our courses not look like that?; but if only golfers knew what went into producing that course over four days, the investment and resources available"*

Tony Grayson, Chorley Golf Club

*"I have always said I am not an expert in any one area of turf management, but have a very good working knowledge of what is required"*

Alan Ferguson, FIFA

# Meet the Pitchcare team



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**Issue 82 December/January 2019** Alan Ferguson, Senior Pitch Management Manager, FIFA

## COVER STORY: It's Fergie Time

When FIFA were looking for an experienced groundsman to undertake the newly created position of Senior Pitch Management Manager, they needed to look no further than Alan Ferguson. In this exclusive interview, the genial Scot explains what his role will involve heading up to the 2022 Qatar World Cup. **P12**

### GOLF

#### Feeling chipper!

A once-bunkered club is rising from a perilous lie as the new owners sink the right investment into the right provision, indoors and out. Greg Rhodes talks to Course Manager Sam Bethell and new owners, Raman and Suba Sandhu, to find out more. **P20**

#### Getting better all the time

Richard Jones, 37, is the Golf Course Manager at Hilton Puckrup Hall Hotel in Tewkesbury. Here, he talks Iprodione, drainage, fairway renovation and more. **P30**

#### Towers above the rest

Founded in 1897, Chorley Golf Club has developed a reputation of being one of the finest golf courses in the area, and recent improvements to both the course and clubhouse have further enhanced its standing. **P36**

#### Danish hygge!

Andrew Dadge is the Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Søllerød Golfklub in Denmark, a role he took up in March 2018. In this question and answer session, he tells us more about his work in one of the most economically and socially developed countries in the world. **P44**

### SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

#### Dutch Master

Dutchman Tom Hooijenga began his career with the Parks Department of his native country, before working for the National Trust and English Heritage. Blair Ferguson chats with him to find out what drew him to work at one of the UK's premier educational facilities. **P52**

#### 300 glorious acres - Lee's hold

Looking after the vast grounds at one of the country's foremost independent schools for girls is a truly challenging task. Neville Johnson went there to meet the man on the spot charged with the job of keeping presentation in top order, everywhere. **P62**



Niall Hazlehurst,  
Rochdale AFC

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## NorthWest Powerhouse SPECIAL FEATURE

### The youth of today eh!

The departure of Tranmere Rovers head groundsman left the Prenton Park pitch being maintained by two teenagers. But, as Lee Williams discovers, the two lads are both competent and ambitious to succeed. **P68**

### A bit of a Deva!

Chester Football Club are currently members of the Vanarama National League North, the sixth tier of English football. The club was founded in 2010 following the winding-up of Chester City. Lee Williams chats to Head Groundsman Michael Barrow about life at the Deva Stadium. **P74**

### In the Nick of time!

Curzon Ashton Football Club is a semi-professional association football club based in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. Founded in 1963 and nicknamed "the Nash", the club is affiliated to the Manchester Football Association and currently competes in the Vanarama National League North, the sixth tier of English Football. **P80**

### Dual battle

It's the middle of October 2018 and the sun is shining, which is rare for Rochdale at this time of year. The temperature is around thirteen degrees and Lee Williams, on his first assignment for Pitchcare, is at the Crown Oil Arena to meet up with Rochdale AFC Head Groundsman Niall Hazlehurst. **P88**

## MULTI SPORTS

### An atomic fusion

Culcheth Sports Club, near Warrington in Cheshire, provides a wide range of sporting and social activities for the local community. A former Department of Atomic Energy sports club, it is now a not for profit facility. Lee Williams met up with their groundsman Ian Trantum to find out how he manages the four acre multi-sports site. **P96**

## RUGBY

### No ifs or Butts...

After an interlude at nearby Coundon Road, Coventry RUFC returned to Butts Road Stadium in 2003, back to where it was founded in 1874. Now plans are in the offing that could transform the stadium to a state of the art sporting and conference venue, complete with an artificial grass pitch. Jane Carley meets Head Groundsman Eric Richardson to discuss developments. **P102**

### King of the Castle

Doncaster Rugby Football Club's first XV are known as the "Doncaster Knights", and play in the RFU Championship. Being the most promoted side in English history has led to massive changes at the Castle Park ground and within the team structure. Lee Blagden explains all to Lee Williams. **P106**

## EQUESTRIAN

### Racing thrives in its natural habitat

Jane Carley discusses the pioneering work being undertaken with padded hurdles at Exeter Racecourse with Clerk of the Course Barry Johnson and Head Groundsman Martin O'Hagan. So successful have they been, they have also been introduced into Wincanton Racecourse. But, there is much more going on at this West Country track. **P112**

## PUBLIC PLACES

### Unveiling the hidden gem

For years the official Royal family residence in Northern Ireland, Hillsborough Castle in County Down, remained closed to the general public due to security concerns. When eventually the doors were opened to visitors, the clientele were said to be of the 'greying generation.' Chris McCullough visited the historic estate to investigate plans to transform the site into a visitor attraction appealing to a wider audience. **P116**

## CONSERVATION

### Cultural heritage

Old age provides few consolations, but that my loyal Labrador cross Collie, Sidbury, is becoming increasingly deaf has made one aspect of our winter walks more bearable: he has never liked loud noises, so the period between bonfire night and the end of the shooting season has, until recently, been a cause of distress. Pitchcare Technical Manager, John Handley reports. **P126**

## TECHNICAL

### Progress and importance

Lee Williams looks at progressions in aeration and offers a timely reminder of why it remains such an important procedure in the turf maintenance programme. **P132**

### Delivery and Installation

Nigel Church, Product Trainer with Cutting Edge Training, looks at machinery delivery and installation, and says there is more hard work involved in getting the sale, arranging the delivery and completing the installation correctly than you might have thought. **P136**

## TRAINING

### Holme help

Pastoral care for prisoners plays a key part of Andy Flanagan's day managing the gardens and grounds team in HMP Holme House, as Greg Rhodes reports. **P140**

### 'Never Complain, Never Explain'

Grounds Training Trainer Frank Newberry has always been fascinated by the maxim 'never complain, never explain'. This advice is believed, by many, to be the UK Royal Family's strategy for dealing with difficult situations. Frank wonders if we can extend the notion to dealing with the tricky situations we sometimes face, perhaps at work or in life in general. **P148**



The Holme House team l-r: Les Gray, Terry Mallerby, Derek Pears, Jeff Wingfield, Colin Steer and Andrew Flanagan

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# Harper Adams University and Maxwell collaboration

The amenity market is increasingly facing legislative challenges to historical turf management practices, leaving end users seeking reputable and tested solutions

**Maxwell Amenity are delighted to announce a collaboration with Harper Adams University to provide independent understanding and set new standards in objectivity and excellence.**

Harper Adams University has a proud tradition of education since 1901 and research trials were in operation by 1912. They have continued to grow and develop as a leading institute in Britain, specialising in agriculture. Modern farming practices have become increasingly technical and Harper Adams University has consistently taken a lead in developing courses and projects to meet the demands that the 21st Century places upon contemporary agricultural systems.

The Crop and Environment Research Centre (CERC) is a self-sufficient, independent trials company at the very heart of the trial work undertaken at Harper Adams University. The research centre provides the facilities and expertise that fuels the research carried out by academic staff in the crop and environment disciplines. Research carried out by staff includes:

- Crop protection (including forecasting, diagnostics, biocontrol, novel forms of control and the implications for food and environmental safety)
- Sustainable production of food and non-food crops
- Efficient use of water by plants
- The impact of production systems on biodiversity

Maxwell Amenity is a Shropshire based fast-growing, dynamic company, with major brands within sports turf, amenity horticulture and



landscaping industries. Maxwell Amenity has grown considerably from its origins in 1988 to become the largest independent company operating within this sector. Since its inception, Maxwell Amenity has been supplying products and services to the amenity sector, both as a distributor and manufacturer. Since 2005, it has been publishing the most respected industry magazine, the Pitchcare Magazine, instigating and documenting change that has been significant and rapid. Maxwell Amenity currently employs over eighty staff.

Technology and scientific understanding are principles that are being utilised to meet the unprecedented challenges facing the amenity sector, and Maxwell Amenity has recognised the need to take a lead, particularly during demanding times. A wave of product withdrawals and amendments, impacting herbicide, fungicide and insecticide control options, has reduced the variety of tools that have ordinarily been used to manage sports surfaces to a professional standard.

Maxwell Amenity recognise that these changes will require more research and greater customer knowledge. As more products have become unavailable, alternative products have been finding their way into the amenity marketplace, some making bold claims with little evidence. Maxwell Amenity recognises the need to cultivate customer confidence in the products they develop and, therefore, was keen to develop a partnership with Harper Adams University and CERC.

Working closely with Principal Lecturer Dr John Reade and Trials Manager Dr Grace Milburn, Maxwell Amenity Senior Technical Manager James Grundy and Technical Manager John Handley were keen to stress the rigour and



John Handley, Maxwell Amenity Technical Manager

independence that Harper Adams University were able to provide, something that both Technical Managers felt would be of significant benefit to the amenity sector.

John Handley commented; "Many customers are quite sceptical of the existing relationships that are prevalent within this sector, and we were acutely aware that we wanted to demonstrate the hard work that goes into deciding what products we want to develop, the ethical considerations that provide us with the confidence to know that these products will be available for a long time, as well as clearly demonstrating that they are effective."

"Some of the technologies we're developing haven't been used in the sports turf sector, so it's incumbent on us, as a manufacturer, to prove that these tools work. We're delighted to be working with Harper Adams University to set standards that demonstrate the integrity and excellence for which Maxwell Amenity is increasingly renowned".

## BASIS Points for magazine subscribers

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

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

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

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

**BASIS**

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

# Come and see us at BTME

Maxwell Amenity set to launch new technology at BTME

Pitchcare's parent company, Maxwell Amenity, will be showcasing a range of innovations and products on stand 128, Blue Zone at BTME between the 22nd and 24th of January.

Maxwell's technical emphasis has been towards expanding and investing in their bio-rational portfolio of plant products. Working closely with leading plant biology experts and basing innovations on contemporary turf product research from universities in the United States, the team have been researching technologies with Harper Adams University with the aim of a new product launch at BTME.

The BTME Turf Management Exhibition in Harrogate is Europe's leading exhibition for turf professionals and buyers and it will be the first time that the Maxwell brand technologies have featured at the show.

A wave of product withdrawals and amendments have impacted fungicide, herbicide and insecticide controls to end users, and customers are increasingly looking to reputable companies to deliver new solutions to meet the challenges



of contemporary turf management and build into integrated turf management approaches.

Dan Hughes, Maxwell Amenity's Sales and Marketing Director commented; "Incorporating a new product launch and some scientific emphasis, we have aimed to make the stand interactive and approachable, whilst developing an enjoyable learning experience for all those who visit. We are also delighted to be supporting BIGGA and investing into building on our growth and success in the golf market."

So, pop along to stand 128 in the Blue Zone to

see what we have on offer, and meet the Maxwell Amenity team who will be pleased to answer your questions.



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# No news is bad news!

As the Environmental Protection Agency continue to delay their report into Rubber Crumb, what importance is being put on the safety of our children?

**The USA Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) report on the dangers surrounding rubber crumb continues to be put on hold. It is believed that the report has been completed, but is being delayed for reasons unknown.**

Conspiracy theories abound, most notably 'how to dispose of old tyres'; they are a product of the modern world. More and more cars results in even more tyres requiring disposal in an ecological manner, and that, at the moment, is a big stumbling block.

Secondly, that a 'Trump' man is now heading up the EPA, and the President's environmental credentials are well known.

Staying in America, the lack of clarity, confirmation - call it what you will - has prompted the Consumer Product Safety Commission to offer the following advice to parents of children exposed to rubber crumb.

#### Advice for Communities Concerned about Recycled Tire Surfaces

"We recognise that communities, parents and state and local officials are concerned about recycled tire materials used in playground surfacing. The study's findings will provide a better understanding of potential exposures children may experience by using playgrounds with recycled tire surfacing. While this short-term study won't provide all the answers, the information will help answer some of the key questions that have been raised.

Communities, parents, state and local officials are encouraged to explore Federal Agency websites (CPSC - <https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/Crumb-Rubber-Safety-Information-Center> and EPA - [www.epa.gov/tirecrumbs](http://www.epa.gov/tirecrumbs)) to review the research results available to date on the use of recycled rubber tires for playgrounds and artificial turf fields.

In addition, concerned individuals can check their state's public health agency websites to determine if there are state-specific recommendations.

Whilst no specific chemical hazards from recycled tires in playground surfacing are known



by the CPSC at this time, the following precautions to limit exposure are recommended:

- Avoid mouth contact with playground surfacing materials, including mouthing, chewing or swallowing playground rubber. This may pose a choking hazard, regardless of chemical exposure
- Avoid eating food or drinking beverages whilst directly on playground surfaces, and wash hands before handling food
- Limit the time at a playground on extremely hot days
- Clean hands and other areas of exposed skin after visiting the playground, and consider changing clothes if evidence of tire materials (e.g., black marks or dust) is visible on fabrics
- Clean any toys that were used on a playground after the visit"

These bullet points are echoed here in the UK by HSE, and the advice would certainly still apply even if the product is eventually deemed safe.

Yet, it is fair to say that dirt never killed anyone and, whilst millions of pounds are being poured into artificial surfaces here in the UK, courtesy of the Football Foundation, the FA Facilities Fund and the Premier League, little or no regard is given to improving already existing natural turf pitches.

One could say that a central hub, with its attendant changing facilities and clubhouse, is the way forward, and that may well be the case in rural areas. In rural areas, however, the cost of travel to and from city hubs is enough to put parents off, let alone having to juggle the other family members requirements. It would seem that the days of Little Johnny going for a kick-

about down the local park are numbered!

Additionally, concerns have been highlighted on two fronts; disposal of old carpets and extreme surface temperatures.

In Holland, the USA and Canada, artificial pitches are being replaced by natural turf or hybrids such are the various concerns surrounding these plastic pitches, whilst the Rugby Football Union (RFU) has suspended its programme of installations in the light of all these concerns.

We applaud the RFU's move and simply wish that the footballing fraternity would follow suit until such times as the outcome is known.

Pitchcare has always stated that there is a requirement for artificial surfaces within our industry, but not at the risk to our children's health and the wider environment. All we are asking is for a modicum of common sense until such times as there's a definitive statement from the experts on the safety of rubber crumb infills.

Innocent until proven guilty is a good maxim to live by but, in this instance, perhaps the reverse should be true?

The article's author, Peter Britton, has been closely following developments in recent years and welcomes the support of other industry publications.

Articles you may find interesting on the Pitchcare website:

[The New Asbestos?](#)

[Don't Swallow](#)

[Is anyone listening?](#)

[Save Our Spaces](#)

[The rubber crumb debate ... and more](#)

## Two new courses added by Reesink

**Two new training courses - Air-cooled Engines and Basic Electrics and Hydraulics - have been introduced by Reesink Turfcare.**

Neil Adams, Turf Division Training Manager commented; "With these two courses we're going back to basics. There's so much technology used in machinery maintenance now with diagnostics tools and the like and, whilst that is incredibly helpful, our customers are telling us they want to learn the

foundation of these subjects such as how to do a complete engine strip down. Both courses offer a solid start for those new to the industry and a fantastic refresher course for those with a few more years under their belt."

The one-day Air-cooled Engines course covers understanding the operation and function of a four-stroke engine, learning how to identify components and operate in-line diesel injection and petrol fuel systems, diagnosing and repairing common faults.

The two-day Basic Electrics and Hydraulics course includes understanding and reading electric and hydraulic symbols and schematics, how to use and demonstrate safe practices with electrical instruments and test equipment and how to diagnose and repair electric and hydraulic systems failures effectively.

Further information can be found at [www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk](http://www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk).

# Online mental health support

Greenkeeper sets up mental health support page on Facebook

**Mike Davie, the Head Greenkeeper of Hazel Grove Golf Club in Cheshire, has set up a successful Facebook page that provides mental health support to greenkeepers in the industry.**

Mike created the page after observing "the increase of expectations of the golfer with increased personal abuse aimed at, and stress among, the greenkeeping community".

He added that he's known greenkeepers who have left the industry due to this, and therefore set up the page 'Greenkeepers mental health support group' in summer 2018. The group already has in excess of 250 members.

"Mental health issues are more apparent nowadays as more seek medical help," he said.

"Yet little support is offered from many golf clubs, and duty of care is apparently not seen as a necessity."

"One of the problems is that clubs are run by well-meaning volunteers which means, when they need to discipline members for acts against



the club's staff, they don't want a confrontation with their 'friends' and would rather brush the matter under the table and resolve the issue by providing a polite pat on the head of the greenkeeper. This all creates a feeling of isolation within the industry. Any sign of acknowledging a problem by oneself is deemed as weak, so we tend to bottle it up, causing greater problems."

"In late 2017, I attended a stress awareness seminar by BIGGA at Sale Golf Club and realised that, by the number who had attended, and the fact that many are highly respected within the industry, we had a problem with mental welfare."

"I started a local support group in south Manchester for greenkeepers who wished to attend and talk out their problems. The realisation that we are not alone made a huge difference. The feedback I got was positive, so the Facebook page was started in late July."

"This group does not always need people to comment but, as I have been told, the fact there is a page that can be accessed gives strength to someone feeling down."

"A big problem with our industry is that it is a high percentage negative industry. For example, you lie in bed listening to the rain, wondering how the course is affected. Will there be breakdowns, will all the staff turn up? The first thought of seeing a committee member is 'what's their complaint?' and so on."

"These sites help to promote the fact we are not alone and, in fact, are a strong community we just need to tap in to, build bridges and connect more."

"In the long term, I hope that the governing bodies will take on the challenge of promoting, supporting and giving help to the welfare of greenkeepers."

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# Goodwood are GEO Certified

## Golf at Goodwood receives GEO sustainability certification

**Goodwood's greenkeeping team has realised its ambition of gaining the coveted GEO (Golf Environment Organisation) Certification, for its commitment to sustainability across both The Park and Downs courses.**

GEO Certified is the symbol of great golf environments worldwide, designating that a golf facility has met a credible standard in sustainability across six key areas. To be eligible for certification, the greenkeeping team had to submit an extensive application that evidenced work in nature, water, energy, supply chain, pollution control and community.

Goodwood's greenkeeping team, led by grounds general manager Phil Helmn, set out to achieve the GEO Certification knowing that it would not just safeguard the environmental future of the courses, but also be of benefit to members and customers and the local community. After independent verification, the GEO concluded that Golf At Goodwood should receive certification because of its "outstanding work to minimise impact on the environment through the introduction of biomass heating, solar panels and enhanced monitoring on water consumption." It continued, stating that "the club has also undertaken numerous natural environment projects providing enhancements to habitat in line with the surveys and advice commissioned by the facility."

The application took twelve months to complete



and involved a holistic approach, with the greenkeeping team working with different departments across the Goodwood Estate, such as forestry, finance, repairs & maintenance, Home Farm and parks & gardens.

Russell Carr, Deputy Head Greenkeeper on The Park course, was credited by Phil Helmn as being the man who pulled all of the resources and information together to submit the application to the GEO. He said; "We've introduced a sustainability ethos into our thinking with our regular team meetings and it has been great seeing each team member embrace it. We've been proud to see the team working towards certification and they have almost become competitive, bringing back photos of the wildflowers and animals that they spot while out on course."

Phil was particularly proud of the work his team had put in and said; "Work towards this certification started four-and-a-half years ago. It's about protecting the planet, looking after our local community and working with the supply chain to broaden this thinking. We look after an

awful lot of greenery and feel personally responsible for protecting these spaces for the good of our planet and for the benefit of future generations. The greenkeeping team has done - and is continuing to do - a wonderful job."



## Financial help for clubs

Sport England partners with Grant Thornton to help grassroots clubs manage their finances

**Financial adviser Grant Thornton has created a programme of online workshops aimed at helping grassroots sports clubs to better manage their finances.**

The workshops are part of a partnership between the business specialist and Sport England and include topics such as "Future fitting your finances".

All content and workshops will be made available via Club Matters, a website run by Sport England offering sports clubs free practical resources.

"Finances are often a challenge for sports and community clubs, which is why we are partnering with Grant Thornton to offer support in this area," said Rosie Benson, head of clubs at Sport England.

"Sports clubs who are successful in the long term are built on sustainable finances and we hope the latest videos go some way to de-mystifying some of the key financial processes that clubs often face."

"These videos add to our growing resource of tools on the Club Matters website, which has helped thousands of clubs so far."

[www.sportenglandclubmatters.com](http://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com)

# John Deere included among the Best Global Brands

**John Deere has again earned a spot among the world's most valuable brands in an annual ranking completed by Interbrand, a leading brand consulting firm. John Deere is ranked 88th in the Best Global Brands research announced today, moving up four spots from a year ago. Interbrand estimates the John Deere brand to now be worth approximately \$5.4 billion.**

"A decade after the global financial crisis, the brands that are growing fastest are those that intuitively understand their customers and make brave iconic moves that delight and deliver in new ways," said Charles Treveil, Global Chief Executive Officer of Interbrand.

Interbrand said its brand valuation is based on three key areas - financial performance of the brand; the brand's influence on purchase decisions; and the brand's strength to create loyalty and sustainable customer demand.

John Deere has been included in the Best Global Brand ranking since 2011 when



Interbrand estimated the value of the John Deere brand to be \$3.65 billion. The Interbrand methodology was the first of its kind to be certified by International Organisation for Standardisation requirements for monetary brand valuation.

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# GEA finalists announced

**The finalists for the 2019 Golf Environment Awards (GEAs), recognising golf clubs and individuals that strive to undertake environmental best practice, were announced in late November.**

Over thirty longlisted clubs were visited earlier in the year and painstakingly whittled down to seventeen finalists, including one club from Switzerland.

Four finalists have been named in three GEA categories - Conservation Greenkeeper of Year, Outstanding Environmental Project and Operation Pollinator. However, such was the competition in the Environmental Golf Course of Year category the shortlist has been increased to five finalists.

Representatives from the finalists will attend the glittering awards ceremony on 23 January at the Crown Hotel in Harrogate, during BTME week.

The GEA provides the platform from which the golf industry can demonstrate environmental excellence in all its forms. This has been demonstrated by past finalists and can range from relatively simple but effective projects, to grand scale schemes.

All finalists receive free entry into the Foundation Award in Amenity Horticulture course, recognised by BASIS, as well as CPD points, and the lucky winners will be able to enjoy a European Golf & Environment Trip of a Lifetime to Portugal.



The Golf Environment Awards 2019 finalists are:

#### **Environmental Golf Course of the Year**

Aldeburgh Golf Club  
Ipswich Golf Club  
Minchinhampton Golf Club  
Warrington Golf Club  
St Andrews Links

#### **Conservation Greenkeeper of the Year**

Les Rae - Montrose Golf Links  
Phil Stain - Notts Golf Club  
Mark Broughton - Aldeburgh Golf Club  
Neil Sherman - Ipswich Golf Club

#### **Outstanding Environmental Project of the Year**

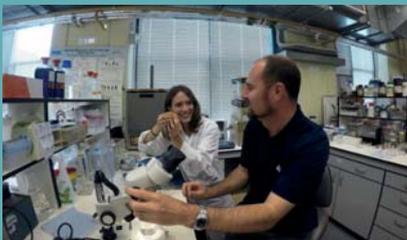
Wylihof Golf Club  
Cotswold Hills Golf Club  
Hallamshire Golf Club  
Woking Golf Club

#### **Operation Pollinator**

Wylihof Golf Club  
Banchory Golf Club  
Wigan Golf Club  
Corhampton Golf Club

The winners will be announced at the Golf Environment Awards Ceremony on Wednesday 23h January 2019, at The Crown Hotel in Harrogate. Tickets for the awards, which includes a three-course meal and drinks, are now on general sale. Please email [enquiries@strigroup.com](mailto:enquiries@strigroup.com) for further details.

A huge thank you also goes to Golf Environment Award partners and sponsors who continue to support and promote the awards year-on-year, without them the awards simply would not be possible: The R&A, BIGGA, The Golf Club Manager, Tillers Turf, Ransomes Jacobsen, Wiedenmann, Aquatrols, Syngenta.



**ICL has joined forces with Royal Holloway, University of London to embark on a unique four-year research project which will look in detail at the effects of seaweed products on turfgrass plant parasitic nematodes.**

The project is funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and ICL.

Integral to the research project is student Tamsin Williams, who was successfully appointed following a rigorous interview process. Tamsin, who throughout the four-year project will be working with ICL to better understand how the commercial side of the sports turf industry works, believes that this studentship was a perfect fit for her ambitions to develop a career in research.

ICL will look to publish this work where possible and intend to present the data openly at a number of events. The industry will be able to gain a greater insight into the project when the research group will speak at BTME's Continue to Learn education programme.

## Tree planting must double

**Government advisers call for radical changes, including turning farmland into forests**

**Tree planting must double by 2020 as part of radical changes to land use in the UK, according to the government's advisers on climate change.**

New forests would lock up carbon but also help to limit the more frequent floods expected with global warming.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) said land currently used to produce food would need to be converted to woodland, growing crops to produce energy and for new homes to accommodate the growing population. Up to 17% of cropland and 30% of grassland could be converted, the report says.

Protecting and restoring peatland, a huge store of carbon, is also vital, as is ensuring no food waste goes to landfill by 2025, but is instead used to generate energy, it adds.

The CCC said that for decades food production had been rewarded with subsidies ahead of other public goods that land could provide, but that Brexit provided an opportunity to reward landowners for helping to fight climate change and its impacts as well as supporting wildlife.

"The incremental changes seen in the past to



how we use land is not enough," said Chris Stark, the CCC chief executive. "There is a window now to have a more radical policy. The land is suffering."

The environment secretary, Michael Gove, said in January: "After a transition, we will replace [subsidies for owning land] with a system of public money for public goods."

The CCC report says the government should increase tree planting from 9,000 hectares (22,239 acres) per year to 20,000ha by 2020, then triple it to 27,000ha by 2030. This would bolster forest cover from 13% of the UK to 19% by 2050. "There are government plans to increase planting rates, but the plans have not been funded and, to date, the targets have been missed," Stark said.

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Alan Ferguson

# It's Fergie time!

When FIFA were looking for an experienced groundsman to undertake the newly created position of Senior Pitch Management Manager, they needed to look no further than **Alan Ferguson**. In this exclusive interview, the genial Scot explains what his role will involve heading up to the 2022 Qatar World Cup



**The role has been created as part of a restructure that has been taking place over three years. I am responsible for supporting the various FIFA tournament managers with the selection of training and stadium pitches for all tournaments, wherever they may be held**

Since its inception on 21 May 1904, in Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, FIFA has governed world football and delivered twenty-one World Cups. As time has moved on, the Women's World Cup has become more prominent along with various men's and women's age group tournaments from Under 17s upwards, totalling seven competitions played on grass.

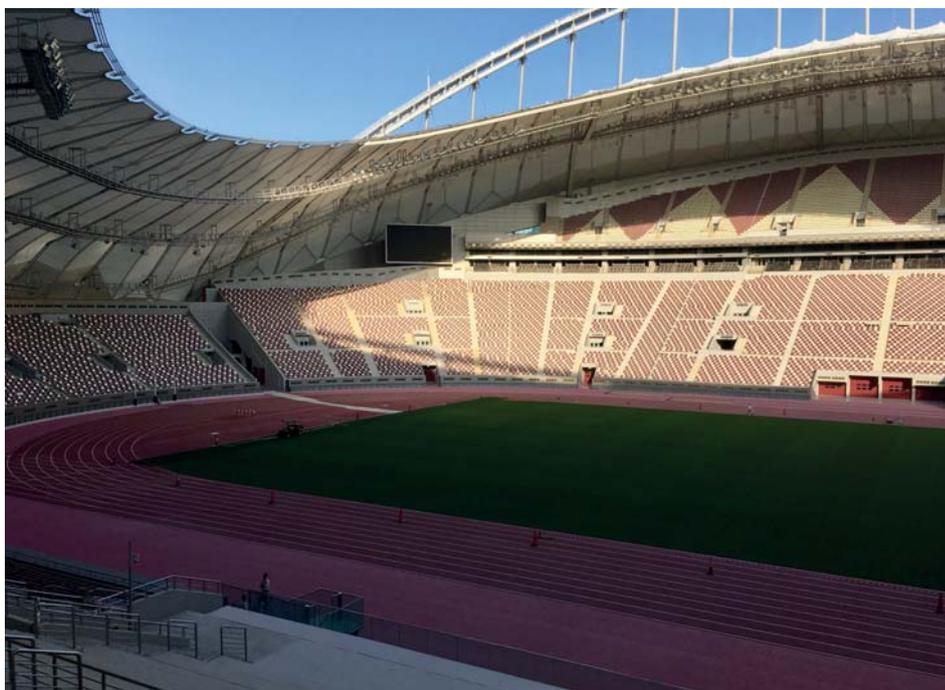
This growth in activity has been matched by increased expectations of the pitches these showpiece tournaments are played on. For the first time in their 114-year history, FIFA has brought pitch management in-house and appointed Alan Ferguson to a role that has him oversee every pitch affiliated with these FIFA tournaments.

His objective is a simple one - provide the best surfaces possible for every tournament. However, the scale of this task is something altogether different. Alan arrived back from Qatar, the host nation of the 2022 World Cup for the first time, at the end of November and has seen the venues that are being constructed in the desert that will soon be under his control.

**Pitchcare: Your role at FIFA is a completely new step for the football governing body as you will be the first in-house pitch expert. Why have they decided to manage pitches themselves going forward?**

**Alan Ferguson:** I was appointed to the position of Senior Pitch Management Manager. As you say, this is the first time that FIFA has taken the management of pitches for their tournaments in-house. The role has been created as part of a restructure that has been taking place over three years. I am responsible for supporting the various FIFA tournament managers with the selection of training and stadium pitches for all tournaments, wherever they may be held. Once the initial selection is made, I work with the Local Organising Committees (LOCs) to ensure the pitches are delivered in line with what coaches and players would expect at a World Cup and FIFA Club tournaments.

I knew I was coming into a big job but, having been here for three months, I now appreciate the scale of the challenge. I



thought the dual role I carried out with the FA from 2015 to 2017 - overseeing the pitches at Wembley and St. Georges Park - was off the scale, but the FIFA role is truly global and on a different planet.

It is a bit surprising that we are in late 2018 and this is the first time FIFA will have an in-house pitch manager but, that said, I am delighted to be the person who has been given the opportunity to oversee FIFA's pitch management operation.

In between now and the Qatar World Cup, there will be fourteen tournaments to prepare for because the youth tournaments are played every two years and the Club World Cup every year. The main focus will be on Qatar; a considerable amount of time will be spent supporting and servicing the other World Cups in the cycle.

**PC: You recently arrived back from your first visit in Qatar, what were your first impressions?**

AF: There has been a lot of discussion on Qatar since they were awarded the World Cup, but you have to take your hat off to them for what they have already achieved. On first impressions, you cannot help but be impressed by the developments and progress made. A lot of good work has already been done looking at stadium design and pitches, and the role of FIFA now will be to work with our colleagues in Qatar to ensure the best from Russia is merged with the best from Qatar to produce a memorable finals.

**PC: FIFA usually like to implement a Legacy Programme with their Stadia. How many are being built for the World Cup and what is the Legacy Programme for them?**

AF: Eight stadia will be used to host the 64 games. There will be a reserve stadium, so nine in total. Right away we have the first challenge as the finals were held in twelve stadiums in Russia with 64 games. I am confident, if we use what was successful in Russia to start the project in Qatar, we will produce excellent surfaces for the 2022 finals.

Khalifa international stadium is the first to be completed



and is currently in use. Three more will come into use over the course of 2019, with the remainder due in 2020.

The eight stadiums being used are:

**Khalifa International:** Capacity here will be 40,000 and will be fully completed by Q3 2020. The legacy programme will see capacity reduced to 20,000 after the World Cup.

**Education City:** Due to be completed by Q3 2020, it will have a capacity of 40,000 being reduced to 20,000 as part of the legacy programme.

**Al Rayan:** Will be completed by Q4 in 2019 and have a tournament capacity of 40,000. This, like some of the others, will reduce to 20,000 in legacy.

**Al Bayat:** In the North of Qatar, this stadium will host games in

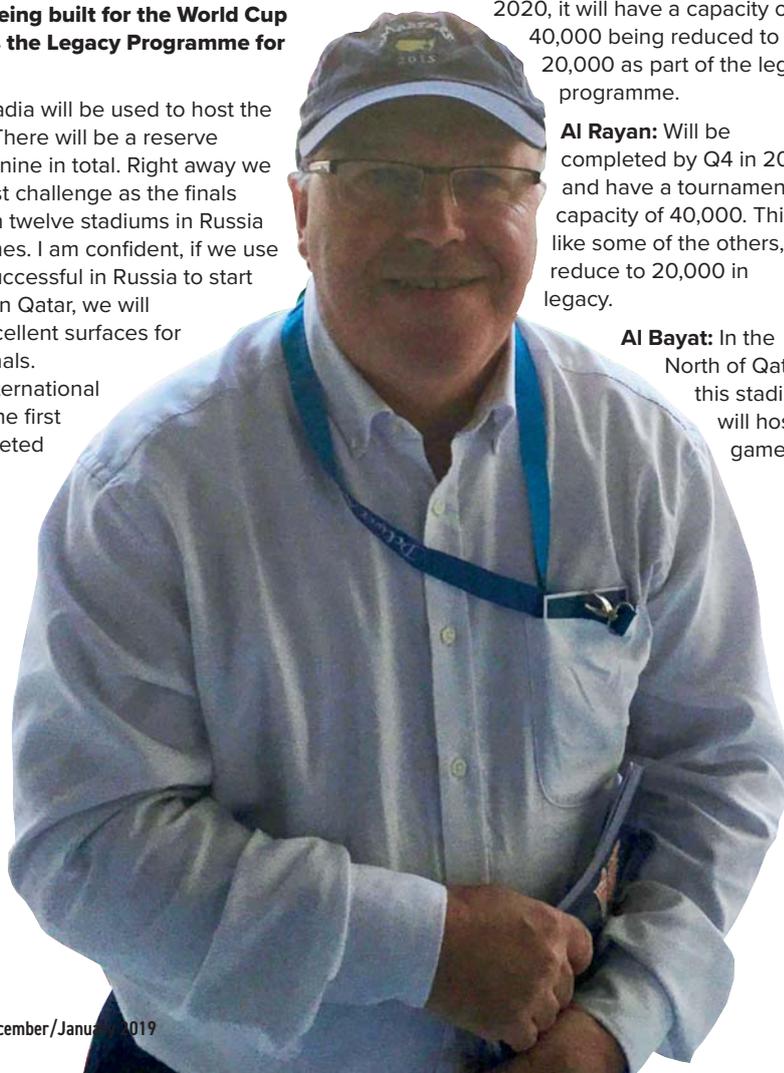
the second phase of the tournament and will have a capacity of 60,000. Legacy will reduce the capacity to 32,000. The stadium also has the challenge of the retractable roof.

**Lusail Stadium:** Situated in the new city being built, which is remarkable to see in itself. The stadium will be the one to host the opening ceremony and opening game, as well as the final and closing ceremony. It will have a capacity of 80,000, which is required for the final by FIFA, reducing to 40,000 after the tournament. It will be completed in Q4 of 2020.

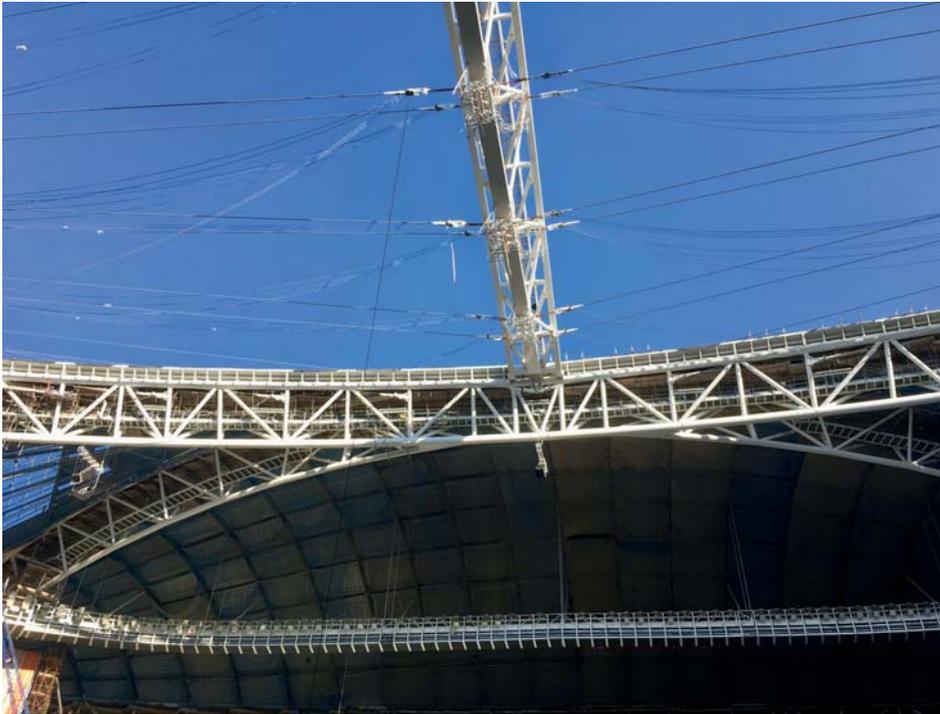
**Ras Abu:** This stadium will be one of the fully demountable stadiums being used in the 2022 finals. Due for completion in Q4 of 2020, it has a capacity of 40,000 reducing to 20,000 after the finals.

**Al Wakrah Stadium:** Will be completed by Q2 in 2019. It will have a tournament capacity of 40,000 reducing, like others, to 20,000.

The stadiums look to be some of most futuristic ever designed for a World Cup and have the innovative idea of some of them



**In between now and the Qatar World Cup, there will be fourteen tournaments to prepare for because the youth tournaments are played every two years and the Club World Cup every year**



being dismantled and donated to developing countries.

**PC: You were involved in the delivery of the 2018 Finals in Russia. What did you learn and how do you think Qatar will compare?**

AF: The experience I gained from my

involvement in Russia during the build-up, and then in the finals, was invaluable. I was working for SIS Pitches who had contracts to deliver six pitches in Russia. The venues in Kaliningrad, Rostov, Samara, Saransk, Spartak and the final venue at the Luzhniki Stadium each threw up challenges which were met and helped deliver one of the best

finals to date. It has been acknowledged that the pitches used in the Russia finals were the best collection of pitches seen at a World Cup. Being all hybrid helped and has shown the way forward.

FIFA have held a very detailed debrief of the 2018 finals with the Russian LOC responsible for delivering the finals, and mandatory recommendations have been made to include hybrid pitches in the stadiums and venue specific training pitches in Qatar. The use of vacuum systems, which is something I agree with, has also been recommended.

Russia saw the finals held in one of the biggest countries in the world and the 2022 finals will be held in one of the smallest, which will offer up unique opportunities. Despite being winter in Qatar, the warm conditions will be a challenge, but one I am confident we can overcome. Qatar is roughly 99 miles end to end and will offer the opportunity to centrally locate workshops and support facilities, which was not possible due to the sheer size of Russia.

**PC: You mention the climate of Qatar. Despite it being their winter, there will be extreme heat in the build-up to the tournament, how are you planning to cope with that?**

AF: We have already talked about the challenges of the heat. As we build up to the World Cup, we will have come out of their summer where temperatures are regularly in

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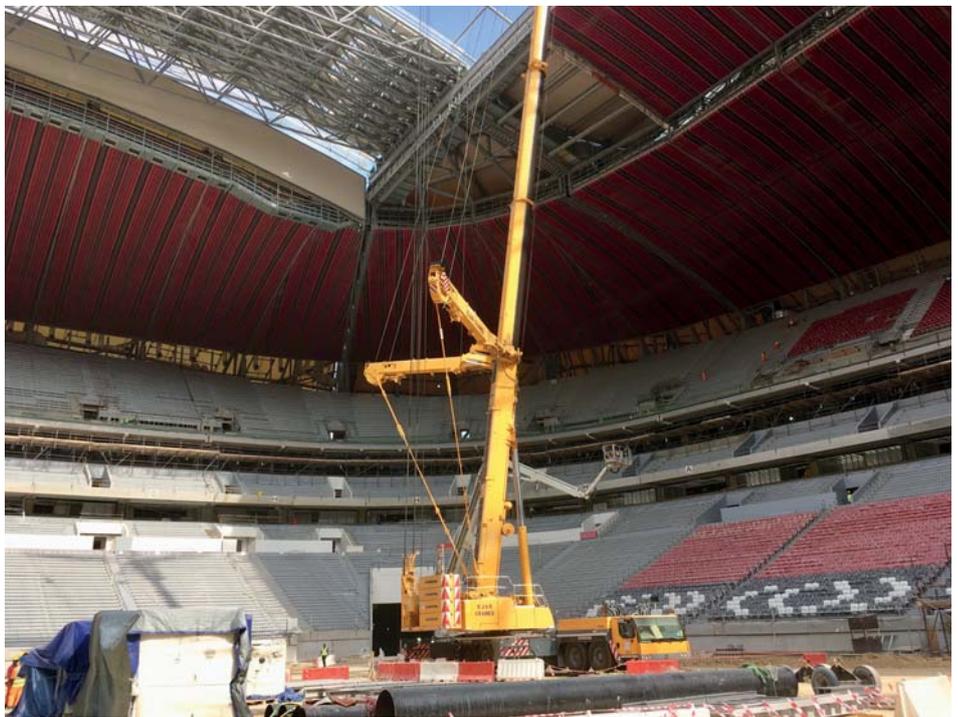


**I have always said I am not an expert in any one area of turf management, but have a very good working knowledge of what is required**

the high 40°C. The warm season grasses will be in transition, so the finals will be played on a mixture featuring ryegrass. There has already been quite a bit of work done on mixtures in Qatar, and part of my job early on will be to bring myself up to speed with that research. Much of the technology already in use in major stadia across the world, such as lights, fans and vacuum systems will form an integrated management system.

I have always said I am not an expert in any one area of turf management, but have a very good working knowledge of what is required. I am forming a pool of experts to support me in my work and their individual expertise, combined with our appointed consultants, will be key in the final decision making on the pitches.

These experts will be drawn from across the turf industry and some of them will be leading grounds managers. In some cases, where I think the grounds team would benefit from additional expertise and leadership, I will be looking to appoint grounds managers on a short-term basis. Many outside the industry never see the pressures groundsman are put under preparing pitches for games. It is hard enough doing this for league games, but in World Cups it is much harder because of all



the extra commercial activity before and in between games, and the intensity of the schedule.

The majority of the local grounds teams will come from an international background. Nearly all of the labour on the ground in Qatar is brought in from around the world, making up tens of thousands of the population. Although led at senior levels by international expertise, there will be a need to get all involved in the maintenance of the pitches onto the same page. I plan to deliver this education with the help of partners. I see customised pitch maintenance courses being ideal here and I will be working to develop course content specific to the World Cup. The IOG were involved in one of my last projects in Kosovo and delivered a workshop in Pristina which went very well. A similar mode of delivery will be equally successful. I will also work with equipment suppliers to deliver a broader induction training to the staff involved.

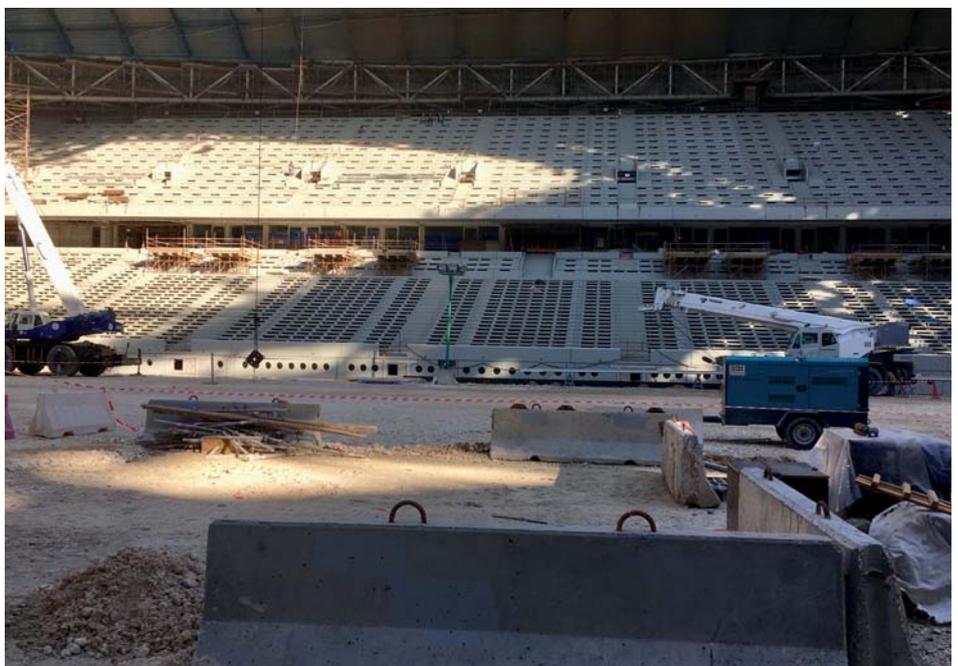
**PC: What equipment will be used to carry out the pitch maintenance in Qatar?**

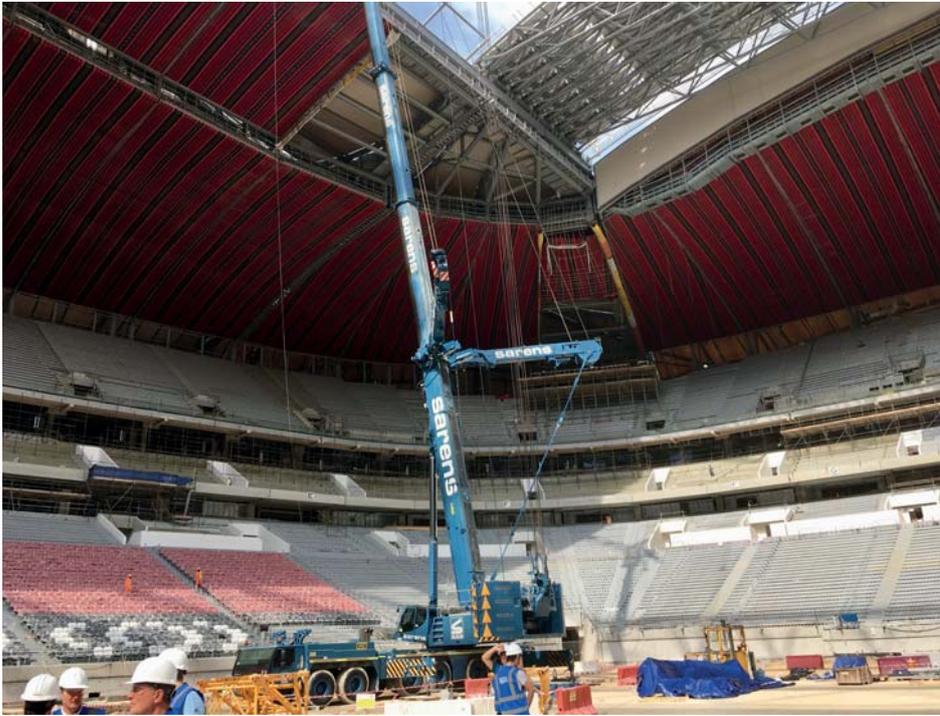
AF: Very similar to what you would expect to find in any major stadium now. Until you work outside the UK, you do not fully realise the influence the UK turf industry has abroad. Many of the well-known brands you see at leading UK and world venues, such as Dennis/Sisis, Allett, Ransomes and Bernhard, are widely used. The specialised equipment is also well represented. Even though brands such as Redexim, Imants and Wiedenmann are built in Europe, they have had a big input from UK groundsman which has helped them to get where they are now. We've now passed the minus four year milestone towards the finals and I will be speaking with these companies to build the most comprehensive range of equipment we can.

Grow lights will also be required in Qatar. Nearly all major stadiums have lights and Qatar for the World Cup will be no different.



**Although led at senior levels by international expertise, there will be a need to get all involved in the maintenance of the pitches onto the same page**





SGL, MLR and TLS, amongst others, will all be considered to ensure we get the best.

Most people talking about the World Cup in Qatar will not think grow lights would be required because of the sunlight they get, but they could not be further from the truth. The stadiums are very futuristic and, in summer, would not require the support from

grow lights. The summer sun in Qatar is very high and nearly all the pitches enjoy full exposure to the sun at some point of the day. However, in the winter when the sun is lower, this is not the case. You have to consider that the species used for the tournament will be rye based and the pitches will be in transition from the warm



**In an ideal world, the transitional phase would be over eight to ten weeks, but we will have around four to five weeks before the games get underway**

season, so the growth and development of the grasses will be dependent on the support of the lights.

In an ideal world, the transitional phase would be over eight to ten weeks, but we will have around four to five weeks before the games get underway.

I am aware a lot of work has already been done in Qatar by the team in the LOC and Supreme committee and I will be discussing their findings with them and hopefully adding to it. Light technology is one of the fastest developing areas of our industry and I am sure will move on even further by the time we reach the 2022 finals.

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**Using the FIFA regulation times for pre-match warm-ups and match time, the pitches will have to facilitate a total of 9,792 minutes which is 163 hours over the 64 games, giving an average of 20.4 hours per pitch. This doesn't include games that can go to extra-time or the various commercial activity, but is a great indication of why we needed to go with a hybrid**

**PC: You have talked about the contribution of hybrid pitches in Russia already. How important is its role in the stability of the pitches for a World Cup that will have an increased number of games at less venues?**

AF: It's massive. Many people who watch the World Cup only see the games. They do not see the pressure the pitches are put under from the various rehearsals and commercial activities that are part of a World Cup. In Moscow, the pitch in the Luzhniki Stadium hosted 85 hours of activity in thirty-five days. That is as intense a use as any pitch I know. Six of the twelve pitches in Russia were SISGRASS whilst three were Grassmaster, and these nine performed really well and show the way forward for top level international tournament football.

With four stadia less in Qatar to host the 64 games and the same amount of commercial activity, the use is likely to be as intense and the use of hybrid technology will be key to a successful pitch delivery.

Using the FIFA regulation times for pre-match warm-ups and match time, the pitches will have to facilitate a total of 9,792 minutes which is 163 hours over the 64 games, giving an average of 20.4 hours per pitch. This doesn't include games that can go to extra-time or the various commercial activity, but is a great indication of why we needed to go with a hybrid.

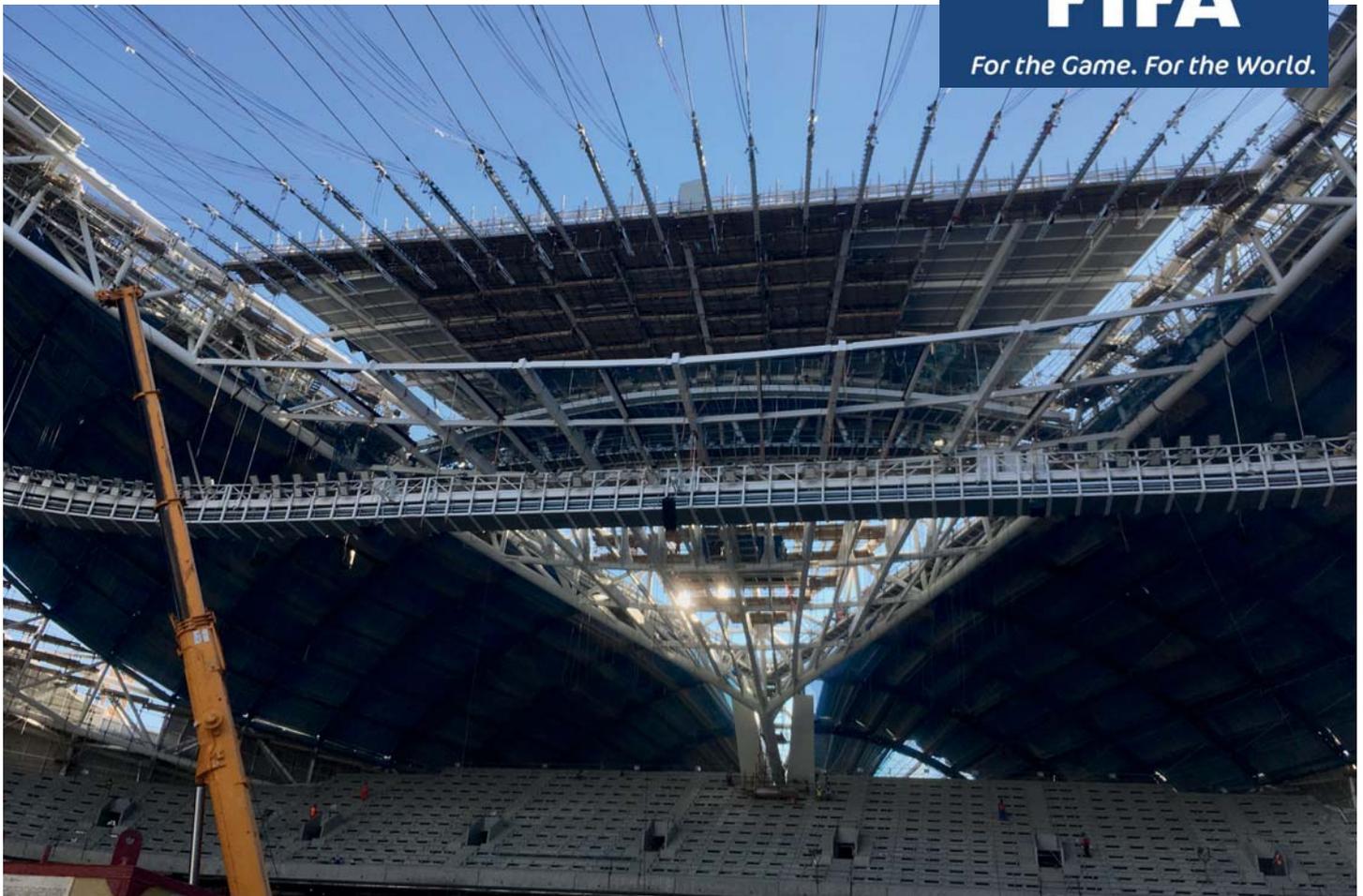
To reduce potential stress on the pitches, discussions are ongoing to move the

Matchday One training sessions to a similarly constructed pitch close to the stadium. If I'm successful in achieving this, it will remove 128 one-hour training sessions from the match pitches.

**PC: Work has been going on in Qatar for a while now. How much infrastructure work has been completed so far?**

AF: The Qataris have been working towards the finals since 2010. Having the World Cup in Qatar is one of a number of projects going on to build up the country and raise its sporting profile. Three stadia will be completed by the end of 2018 with the remainder getting underway in 2019. Many other infrastructure projects are at various stages of completion. To increase the travel links, they are currently building a state-of-the-art Metro link which will feature driverless trains, operating on three lines, connecting all eight stadia to the main fan hubs. Work is also ongoing to increase the air capacity at both Hamid International Airport and the old Doha International Airport, and thousands of additional hotel rooms are under construction for fans at the 2022 finals.

**PC: Thank you for your time and we wish you well in your new role.**



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We're already nudging 400 members with a target of 500 in our sights. Members are returning and we've witnessed a big uptake in clubhouse activity since the six-figure investment the new owners have made

## Chipstead Golf Club

# Feeling chipper!

A once-bunkered club is rising from a perilous lie as the new owners sink the right investment into the right provision, indoors and out. Greg Rhodes talks to Course Manager **Sam Bethell** and new owners, **Raman** and **Suba Sandhu**, to find out more



**S**urrounded by Surrey affluence, Chipstead Golf Club should have enjoyed a secure financial footing. Yet this traditional members club, boasting a picturesque 18-hole downland course, had reportedly stagnated, whilst market forces drained it of membership income.

As the 2018 golf season dawned, selling up seemed the sole option open to the owners, until a chance remark led to a miracle.

The hard facts about golf in England are that too many courses sprung up in the 1980s and '90s, anticipating huge take-up in the sport - but participation levels plateaued and rise of the nomad golfer killed diehard loyalty to one club.

The density of courses around the capital and other cities is such that only the fittest will survive and, to do that, demands a new approach to the game - the business of golf.

Transforming the condition and playability of the course to create year-round provision is a given now, whilst also developing clubhouse facilities to attract the family and wider community for functions, ceremonies and celebrations.

Spring was looking bleak for Chipstead. Over the last decade, member levels had fallen from a healthy 500+ to fewer than 300. With that number in the locker, there's little wriggle room to turn things around.

Current course manager Sam Bethell had arrived in June 2015 as Mike Oram's deputy, taking over in November after Mike's

departure the month before with thirty years' service at the club under his belt, fifteen of them heading the greens team.

"From the start, I tried to bring in new ideas but, unfortunately, 'no funding' was the usual response," Sam recalls.

"With membership not as strong as it once was, money was not available to be spent on the course. Standards of greenkeeping had fallen it seemed. Without regular aeration, the greens were soggy and members didn't like playing off temporaries all winter.

In truth, with the club thinking of selling up, our hands were tied, and poor communication going from the previous greens team to the clubhouse didn't help."

The green belt days are numbered



Course Manager Sam Bethell



**I knew that golf clubs generally struggle, but good ones can thrive, so we researched some in the region to see what they were doing right that Chipstead wasn't**

with courses; "Some twelve to fifteen private members clubs within a 10-mile radius of Chipstead, so we have plenty of competition," Sam explains.

"The clubhouse, built in 1994, was not future-proofed for the way golf would develop. The bar and dining room are upstairs, but toilets and changing rooms were downstairs." The comparison with thriving clubs such as Bletchingley and Kingswood was clear, adds Sam. "Their clubhouses were built to hold functions - ours was built primarily for golf."

That was then, this is now. Just six months after the Dosanjh Foundation bought Chipstead, a once-bunkered club is rising from a perilous lie as the new owners sink the right investment into the right provision, indoors and out.

"We're already nudging 400 members with a target of 500 in our sights," Sam records. "Members are returning and we've witnessed a big uptake in clubhouse activity



Sam with Raman and Suba Sandhu

since the six-figure investment the new owners made in it."

The open-plan layout upstairs and extended balcony gives far more sense of space and comfort, as well as light, bolstered by new windows.

#### **New beginning**

The way back began when local residents Raman and Suba Sandhu heard something on the grapevine whilst their sons were taking golf lessons at the club.

"Someone mentioned that Chipstead was for sale," Raman explains, "but when that fell through I thought 'that sounds terrible, can we do anything to help?'" It would be a massive loss locally, so I mentioned it to my father, Peter Dosanjh, who runs several business ventures and was seeking a new investment opportunity."

"I knew that golf clubs generally struggle, but good ones can thrive, so we researched some in the region to see what they were doing right that Chipstead wasn't."

"We know little about golf, but we have plenty of experience in business and we thought we could bring our management skills into the club to turn it round," Raman adds.

"It's a massive challenge of course, especially as golf is a new sphere for us, but our understanding of business means we can bring a more commercial approach to running the club and bring it up to speed."

Because the previous owners had been looking to sell, precious little upgrading had been done over the years. "Things had been allowed to deteriorate," Raman notes.

In contrast, Chipstead's new owners have acted fast. "Our task was to look at ways to make the club more attractive for people," says Raman, not only for members but also the local community generally by offering a leisure destination that makes them want to spend more time here."

The marketing skills they have applied to their other businesses are now finding force at Chipstead and the recovery is underway.



“Members had been looking elsewhere because of the club’s uncertain future,” she continues. “All membership options are under review now and we are seeking a licence to hold civil ceremonies.”

A major upgrade to the clubhouse has boosted function capacity by up to forty covers, she adds, enabling Chipstead to stage larger, more diverse, events.

Meanwhile, investment in the course is

already reaping benefits, Sam reports.

“The state of the club and the course was a constant worry. We were behind on everything and we knew a big job was needed to turn things around.”

A downland course in a mature landscape, Chipstead suffered issues common to semi-rural settings. “We have pines, oaks, conifers, poplars and beech here, but no tree management plan was in

place and some holes were suffering significant shading.”

Since the purchase, communications have strengthened and been streamlined. “I link with Suba by email twice a week and daily with director of golf Gary Torbett, who’s been here since 1990, keeping him up to speed, then sit down with the captains every two months to update them on developments.”

# EDUCATE EXHIBIT EVOLVE

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**Fair to say, the club was in financial difficulties, so outlay on the course was always limited. The greens were in a bad state. I play golf, so appreciated the issues we faced**

Members are in the loop too via Sam's column in the monthly newsletter, where any likely maintenance disruption to the course is noted.

"There's minimal red tape now and we're moving forward quickly on the improvements needed on the course."

The marks of history pepper Chipstead's acres. Pillboxes trace the line of the London mainline railway and Croydon Airport was close by too. "Germany targeted main transport routes and hubs, so it's little wonder that large grassed craters litter the course, recording the impacts of wayward bombs.

Decades later, they form part and parcel of Chipstead's character. "No unexploded shells have been unearthed yet," Sam confirms, "but you never know."

Sam returns to the days before the purchase. "Fair to say, the club was in financial difficulties, so outlay on the course was always limited. The greens were in a bad state. I play golf, so appreciated the issues we faced."

Sam's always been in greenkeeping and went into it straight from school at eighteen, spending a year at Cuddington in 2002. "My father-in-law, Stuart Sheppard, was course



manager there, so that helped," he says.

He moved four years later to prestigious St George's Hill, Weybridge, for a year before "taking a step back in my career" by moving to Chelsea training ground in 2007.

"I was part of a massive team," he recalls. "Ten people looked after the first team pitches alone. I learnt plenty about machinery, and lots of practical but little theory, which I was keen to pursue."

Sam's next move, to Richmond, proved seminal to his progress. "Course manager Les Howkins pushed me on the education and theory side, as well as involving me in a two-year renovation project for the fifty-seven bunkers there. I'd taken Level 2 at Cuddington and started Level 3 whilst at Chelsea."

"CPD was massive at Richmond and, whilst on the team, I joined BIGGA."

Still active within the Association, Sam sits on the Surrey board and is vice-chairman of the South East region as well as education officer.

Leaving Richmond in a senior role - senior greenkeeper - Sam spent just three months at Wimbledon Park under course manager Dave Langheim, before Chipstead

beckoned.

He soon resumed the education trail, completing a three-year foundation degree in Sports Turf Management from Myerscough College in May 2018.

Tellingly, he states: "I'm a course manager not a head greenkeeper. I'm a manager who handles budgeting, health and safety strategy and my title reflects that role. I take the team through training files, set targets every year and agree everything with Suba and the director of golf."

#### Soil biology

Greens were the major focus for Sam when he came on board. "With nothing to lose, I introduced a programme of Symbio compost teas and Thatcheater into the profile. Two years later, the thatch layer had shrunk from two and half inches to just half an inch."

"I was bitten by the soil biology bug at Richmond as Les was big into it there," says Sam. "I'm still using compost teas, but we don't use Thatcheater as soil condition is stable and the sward and rootzone are healthy, so we've been able to reduce the five or six fungicides we were applying in winter to just a couple, and we only core in



**I'm a course manager not a head greenkeeper. I'm a manager who handles budgeting, health and safety strategy and my title reflects that role**





spring and September. It's a case of letting the turf work for itself."

"The STRI recommended 2ltr Banner Maxx broad spectrum foliar fungicide and 1ltr Medallion fungicide - which we applied in the last week of September - and we have no sign of disease to date."

Overseeding with Barenbrug Allbent is preferred "as it establishes quicker on soil pushup greens and is drought and disease

resistant."

Seed strategy across the course is to encourage fescues and deter rye. "We let the fescue grow thick in summer, cutting and collecting with the Amazone," says Sam, "and, next year, we'll be spraying with Laser to thin out rye in the long rough by preventing it reseeding and allowing the fescue to thrive."

The team limits Poa coverage by cutting

off seed heads when growth is most vigorous in May. "It's not much of a problem though," Sam confirms.

On top of the two granular fertilisers applied across the course, Sam also opts for liquid seaweed, sprayed as part of a cocktail every fortnight at half rate until concentration steadies.

"When we applied it full rate, the concentration would fall off in the third



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**Members tell us the greens are the finest in thirty years. The more golf we attract the better and Chipstead is a tight, entertaining course with a few hills**

week, whereas applying it at half rate maintains a constant level in the plant.” Humic and fulvic acid boosters and CMS Shoot add essential nutrients for a vibrant, healthy summer sward.

All the good work is in danger as Chipstead’s golf rounds tally rises - one reason why Sam’s tightened up on traffic management. “Posts and roping off around banks help prevent apron wear and trolley lines,” he says, “whilst buggies aren’t allowed around the greens anymore.”

Since the acquisition, the maintenance regime has shifted dramatically.

“The strategy is to work around the golf. Every other Monday between April and October we undertake greens maintenance and don’t now need the rolling temporary greens. We’ve agreed a maintenance week in May as well. It was April, but we stay colder longer because the course is higher up.”

And the good news just keeps coming. “Members tell us the greens are the finest in thirty years. The more golf we attract the better and Chipstead is a tight, entertaining



course with a few hills.”

“We have our own Amen Corner - the 11th, 12th and 13th long par 3s, with trees, bunkers and thick rough. With six par 3s in total, golfers think they can rip the course to pieces, but they get a shock.”

“Green fees have risen markedly, players are signing up as members after their experience here and society days are rising.”

The club has much to offer, Sam maintains. “Chipstead is an affluent area, but that isn’t reflected in the membership profile. We were once a feeder club for clubs like Walton Heath, but not any longer. There’s no social divide. Everyone sits together and chats. Our priority is to increase the numbers playing here and attending functions.”

Soon after acquiring Chipstead, Suba asked Sam for his wish list. “The dream and the reality were not too far apart,” Sam says. “They have an understanding of how the club can be run sustainably and how the course management function fits within the

overall plan.”

“We were very happy with what we’ve agreed and Suba and his team are showing trust in us to help them run Chipstead as a business.”

As a major element of the budget, machinery is high on the list. “The shed holds plenty of Toro, on a five-year lease until 2021. “The electric-drive mowers we have tried from another brand didn’t quite suit the course topography. Hydraulic drive machines are a better option, I find. We’ll be working hard to strike the keenest deal for sure.”

His call for a turf iron greens roller, utility vehicle and an extra cut brush for the Toro tees and aprons mower have been answered, as has his request for an apprentice.

Irrigation issues loom large too. “Summer 2018 saw plenty of hand watering of greens and tees, so replacing the irrigation system, installed in 1984, is on our hit list. We’re looking at the cost of one that supplies tees, greens and aprons.”



**We were very happy with what we’ve agreed and Suba and his team are showing trust in us to help them run Chipstead as a business**





Water extraction is possible but limited, Sam adds. "Only 10m<sup>3</sup> a day can be abstracted from our borehole because of the size of the pump, and we need to pipe plenty of water if we are going to experience summers like the last one more often."

Long overdue under the previous owners, the maintenance area is undergoing a transformation as new sheds, complete with water recycling facility and better welfare for the team, rise from the planning stage.

"Our current shed is a 1950s modified Anderson shelter," Sam reveals. "We have to keep security extra tight because of its age and condition, and golf clubs have been targeted heavily in recent years. Plenty of deterrents are in place and the shed has been strengthened."

That's key for another reason. "Golf clubs are having to pay through the nose for insurance and, after any theft, insurers want to see an improvement in security before they will cover you."

Resource management is critical in these first months under new ownership and Sam's already put in place measures to maintain efficiency. "Early Start dew suppressant keep the grass plant dry on the greens and it's healthier without that moisture. Using it also avoids me losing a man for a couple hours brushing dew off the greens. We are focusing more on resources now."

#### Snails' pace

Wildlife impacts the daily routine in an unusual way because in this quiet corner of Surrey lurks an unusual lifeform - Roman white snails. "They are big, the size of your palm, and like chalkland, congregating in bunkers on the 17th hole and by the putting green, where they lay their eggs," Sam reveals.

"We cannot spray for a couple of months in summer and keep placing them back in the undergrowth. Flymoing around bunkers is done with care as we want to avoid



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# Getting Personal

## Sam Bethell - he's leaving on a jet plane!

**Who are you?** Sam Bethell, Course Manager at Chipstead Golf Club.

**Family status?** Married to Jenny for 9 years, two daughters aged 5 and 8.

**Who's your hero and why?** My dad. He was the best man at my wedding. My dad did everything he could to provide for my family (along with my mum). Lost his job in the print when I was a teenager, so he went back to using his building skills and took me with him. Had me mixing cement, hod carrying and building fences when I was twelve. Showed me how to graft and why. He's what you would expect of a man from Lambeth Walk, South East London; common as muck, strong as an ox, always dapper and Millwall.

**What would you change about yourself?** Less dramatic, need to chill out a bit more.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** Christmas music and films, all year, not just because it's December.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** Completing my FdSc Sportsturf in May. Left school with one GCSE, hated school, but knew I could do something like that if I was interested in the subject.

**What are your pet peeves?** Noisy eaters. Chewing with your mouth open, smacking your lips or talking with your mouth full. All of that makes my head explode.

Also, bad manners. Costs nothing to say please and thank you, hold a door open or give up your seat. Seeing less and less in the way of good manners.

**If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be?** Antigua, went there for my honeymoon. Stunning place. Company was half decent too.

**What's the best part of your job?** Working with my team and seeing them improve as greenkeepers. It's great when they learn a new skill or gain some knowledge. When they come to you with ideas from what they've learned it makes you feel good.

**... and the worst?** Shed days. Bad enough that they're normally due to awful weather, but being stuck in a shed sweeping dust or tidying benches is my idea of hell.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** Not really. Mainly just want to be around long enough to see my girls grow up.

**Which three albums would you take to a desert island?** Arctic Monkeys - Whatever people say, that's what I'm not. Nirvana - Nevermind. Gorgon City - Sirens.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** Other than my wife? Kelly Brook.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Pay the mortgage off.



**What would you consign to Room 101 and why?** Nickelodeon. My daughters watch programmes on there that make me want to scoop my eyes out.

**Remain or Brexit?** Brexit.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** Mike Tyson, Dave Grohl and Gazza.

**If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why?** My youngest daughter, then I could get some insight as to what the hell is going through her head at times. She's crazy, pretty sure she's feral too.

**Do you have any bad habits?** I blow my nose in the shower and I know it's like an ocean liner has sounded its horn. Could wake the dead.

**... or any good ones?** I make the wife coffee when I get up for work. Keeps her sweet.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** No, never. If I'm concerned, I make a list so it's planned out.

**What are you reading at the moment - hard copy or online?** 'Because my dad does' - online. About following in your dad's footsteps as a Millwall supporter.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Don't give them everything straightaway, leave them wanting more so it gives you something to keep working to.

**What's your favourite smell?** Jet fuel, love that smell at the airport.

**What do you do in your spare time?** Football, I go to watch Millwall with my daughters.

**What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked?** Am I on a prison release programme? Was asked by a lady member at The Richmond GC when she saw my tattoos.

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** Verti-drain, I do like punching holes in things.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Honest, reliable and big.

**What talent would you like to have?** Play an instrument; guitar or drums would be good.

**What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?** Tougher sentencing on knife crime, minimum custodial sentence of at least five years. Even if just caught carrying.



**When the inevitable happens though, we'll have to replace him with a Level 2 at least, as a I can't afford to lose that skills base**

hearing that sickening crunch."

Woodland between the course and the railway line is home to roe deer, which stray on to the course, and to red kites, now proliferating in the south. A large family of "talkative" tawny owls are resident too.

"Foxes can cause an issue," Sam says, "but the Resist repellent we knapsack spray deters them from soiling the bunkers."

The team are active in other areas of wildlife management, setting up hedgehog homes, whilst also working with Reigate Beekeepers Association, who tend four beehives.

Encouraging favourable environments for moths and butterflies is also a priority, Sam adds. "Ragwort thrives in the long rough - a natural haven for the cinnabar moth caterpillar with its striking black and deep orange markings. Meadow flowers are abundant, particularly species like the common spotted orchid."

### Building the team

The five-man, multi-skilled greens team presents firm prospects for further building up the standard of course presentation, Sam maintains. "This is a young team and it's important everyone fits into that structure and culture. I believe we can look forward to exciting and productive times at Chipstead."

Deputy course manager Jack Percival, 24, joined a year ago after a spell as head greenkeeper at Aquarius Golf Club, following Purley Downs and Addington Palace before that.

"He's keen and ambitious," notes Sam, "a fast learner and popular with members and the clubhouse." With his Level 2, spray and chainsaw certificates, Jack starts his Level 3 this January."

"As a trained machine greenkeeper, Jack's a big benefit, doing servicing and grinding in house. He is great at diagnosing faults, buys the parts and ensures machine downtime is low."

Arriving from university four years ago as a winter temporary after graduating in ecological science, greenkeeper Simon Torkington, 26, is now a permanent fixture - sort of.

"He is still undecided as to whether he wants a career in greenkeeping, which is frustrating as he is good and reliable," Sam



L-r: Chris Shepherd, Sam Bethell, Jack Percival, Javahn Herod, Simon Torkington and Bomber the squirrel/crow scarer

explains. "He doesn't go sick and is never late. I try to tell him he could have a fantastic career in the sector."

Sam adds, "Simon undertakes everything that doesn't require a licence. Money isn't the issue with the club as, if he became qualified, we would pay the wage. Every week I wonder if he has handed in his notice."

"When the inevitable happens though, we'll have to replace him with a Level 2 at least, as I can't afford to lose that skills base."

Chris Shepherd, 29, "clicked on contact" when Sam interviewed him in June 2017 for a greenkeeper's post. "Another team member who is keen and popular, Chris plays golf at Horton Park, Epsom but has no real industry experience as such."

The potential was evident though. "I fast-tracked him and he's started his Level 2 at Hadlow College in November - where Jack also attends."

"Chris asks lots of questions, loves riding mowers in shorts and T-shirt and swears this is the career for him, so I have high hopes for him."

Newest recruit to Chipstead's green team is apprentice Jovahn Herod, 19. "A young

lad from Croydon, Addington, he's related to Jack through Jack's fiancée. We were searching for a summer casual and he hit the mark straightaway."

"First tasks like trimming the pop-ups 'didn't sway him', says Sam. "He's certainly keen and has graduated to machinery. By the end of next year, he'll be a regular greenkeeper and says he's found his career here."

Working closely with Gary and Sam, and the kitchen and bar staff, is enabling the club's new owners to power forward to improve course presentation and the clubhouse offering.

"We are extremely fortunate in having inherited a strong, passionate team that is in tune with our vision for Chipstead - working in unison with the golf side," says Raman.

"Members have told us how dedicated Sam and the greens team are. It's just a shame that the required investment hadn't been made before now, but we are making every pound invested work as hard as it can to move the club forward, like looking to align contracts across the board, including course machinery, and win better deals with suppliers."



**We are extremely fortunate in having inherited a strong, passionate team that is in tune with our vision for Chipstead - working in unison with the golf side**

Decisions had been made "short term", she adds. "Now we are working with Sam to plan for the next five to ten years, whilst meeting his immediate needs."

"This is such a lovely club with a great friendly face and community spirit, but few who live even half a mile away know that it exists. We all aim to change that."



### What's in the shed?

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Toro Hoverpro hover mowers x 2  
Various Stihl blowers, trimmers and chainsaws





Hilton Puckrup Hall

Getting better  
all the time

**Richard Jones, 37, is the Golf Course Manager at Hilton Puckrup Hall Hotel in Tewkesbury. Here, he talks Iprodione, drainage, fairway renovation and more ...**

**N**aturally, the course here at Hilton Puckrup Hall is split into two profiles by the road which intersects it. There are nine holes on one side and nine on the other.

One side is constructed on land high in sand and gravel content but, on the back 9,

some holes are clay-based. There is no noticeable difference in playability, although the clay-based half retains more moisture and, therefore, did not burn off as much during the hot summer that we witnessed.

We've done extensive drainage work over the last few years, including digging large ditches. We also mole bored a sixteen inch solid pipe right under the road, to link the wet area of the back nine of the course to the lake system, located on the other side of the road. We've also done some gravel banding to link up existing drainage lines on some fairways.

Previously, we could have a flash lake form on the 15th fairway, up to half an acre in size, and that would take days to drain.

Since the link, no water has held there at all. We've been open when we would have once had to shut this hole for about a week.

If we were to isolate any points for development in the coming years, it would be to add to that drainage success. We'd implement more drainage over the four holes closest to the 15th fairway, and have the infiltration rates uniform across the course.

We harvest our water for irrigation during the winter months and store it in our lake system. During the summer that we have just had the course baked hard, there was some thinning of turf on all areas, but we were out hand-watering greens daily. Hand watering became essential for us due to the prolonged dry spell of the summer as our



**The bunkers are lined and were built in the American style, with very steep faces. It's a test to keep the sand from pooling at the centres. I'd say that, even though bunkers are one of the most labour-intensive features of any course, it's particularly the case here**

water reserves became dangerously low and we had to prioritise areas for irrigation. Together with the use of wetting agents, we were able to just about keep on top of moisture levels on the greens, but I was glad to see the rains arrive in the autumn!

The sward got a little bit thinner on the greens towards the end of the summer, due to high stress levels, so our focus over late summer/early autumn was definitely regaining that density as I knew that this autumn was going to be possibly the hardest that we have witnessed, disease pressure wise, due to chemical availability.

I'll continue by giving some background on our course's key characteristics, and those of our maintenance regimes.

The bunkers here were built in the American style, with very steep faces. It's a test to keep the sand from pooling at the centres. I'd say that, even though bunkers are one of the most labour-intensive features of any course, it's particularly the case here.

We use a coarse sand, with a slightly heavier particle size in the bunkers. That

was in an attempt to have the heavier particles stick better with the faces and reduce sand migration. We've removed around 10-15% of the bunkers in the last decade that have become redundant due to technology and to reduce labour and maintenance requirements.

That said, another feature of our course - the trees - are like painting the Forth Bridge: even when you've finished crown raising or thinning, you just have to go back to the first bit and start again. A lot of the mature trees on the course and hotel grounds are covered by TPOs and we have all trees externally surveyed bi-annually and have tree surgeons come in to carry out the suggested works.

We refurbished all bunkers ourselves, about eight years ago. They were completely dug out, drains cleared and added to, bases lined with upside down turf, new pipes and stone added and finally filled with new sand and compacted. We top up any bunkers that require sand replenishment throughout the year.

In the next year or two, I'll be completing





**I'm not a big user of the stimpmeter - I prefer a putter- but our greens tend to run at between 9.5 and 11 year-round. I tend to avoid allowing them to get higher than that, unless it's for a specific event**

my gauge on which company might be the best fit to update that base-layer technology, for our style of bunkers.

Our greens are predominantly a mix of poa and bent and, of course, we're trying to introduce more bent incrementally.

I visited the Netherlands last November with Ray Hunt (ALS) and Matt Gresty (Limagrain) to look at and discuss products that they had to offer, as I was keen to give them a try. We've gone with their all-bent

mix. I met with Matt a few weeks ago to inform him that we'd got a great strike rate from our last overseeding as I was over the moon with the results that we achieved.

That was really important after this summer, to help us recover from the heat stress. It integrated well, as we have a history of seeding with all-bent.

We haven't overseeded the tees now for some years. I didn't think we needed to, as the sward was resiliently good across the

board, but it is something that I will be looking to once again due to increased levels of golf we have witnessed over the last number of seasons.

I'm not a big user of the stimpmeter - I prefer a putter- but our greens tend to run at between 9.5 and 11 year-round. I tend to avoid allowing them to get higher than that, unless it's for a specific event, as we have a wide selection of player handicaps that use the course, from members to corporate days

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# Getting Personal

## Richard Jones - it could get very in-tents at work!

**Who are you?** Richard Jones, Golf Course Manager at Hilton Puckrup Hall.

**Family status?** Engaged to be married in April. I have a two-year-old daughter, Olivia.

**Who's your hero and why?** Tiger Woods. I'm a massive fan.

**What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far?** Becoming course manager at 26 years old and working as part of the greenkeeping support team at 2010 Ryder Cup.

**If your younger self saw you now, what would they think?** He'd be proud of what I've done with my career.

**Which famous people wind you up?** Jose Mourinho and Donald Trump.

**What job would you love, other than your own?** Vineyard owner in France.

**A wasp lands on your arm - what do you do?** Squash it.

**If you could domesticate any animal, which would you choose as a pet?** A horse.

**What was the most embarrassing moment in your life?** That's unpublishable.

**Brexit or Remain?** Remain.

**What is your favourite film?** American Gangster.

**What scares you?** Heights.

**What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film?** My Way. Tom Hardy.

**What is your favourite sport?** Golf, although I'm also a very keen horseracing and football fan.

**What would you cast into Room 101?** Drivers that do not thank you when you pull over to let them pass. Brexit.

**Which historical time and place would you most like to visit?** To any of the times and racecourses that my dad rode a winner as a professional jockey as he retired shortly after I was born.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** To run the London Marathon.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** Tiger Woods. Noel Gallagher. Winston Churchill.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Treat others as you want to be treated.

**What's your favourite piece of trivia?** There is no word that rhymes with orange.

**What's your favourite smell?** Smoked bacon.

**Which three songs would you take to a desert island?** Masterplan - Oasis, Run - Snow Patrol, With Or Without You - U2.

**What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked?** Can you put tents over every green overnight to stop them freezing during frosts?

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** Our pedestrian aerator.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Approachable. Friendly. Loyal.

**Finally, what is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson/greenkeeper?** Work hard to prove your worth.



or golf breaks, all of which are tested on what are already challenging greens (there are five MacKenzie-style greens).

The recent removal of Iprodione I feel will be huge for us as an industry. Not having that safety net of a curative product to me will mean using new types of fungicides, more topdressing, more aeration through to November, and even more emphasis on the use of nutrients to produce a stronger plant at the end of summer, ensuring that the plant is a strong as possible heading into the notorious disease prone months.

Timing the use of products is as important as product selection; using GDD data to predict when you'll get the most bang for your buck. That's now a much more important factor when planning feed and fungicide programmes.

I tend to have my soil samples done in the same week each January, because my feed tends not to change much year-on-year, and I feel this gives a better indication of what we have in the profile.

Barring difficult weather conditions, I know that the nutrient levels and pH will be similar to the same time the previous year, so I can monitor those and the organic material reliably. That January information will guide my March and October operations, which will include OM control.

Going back to disease management, I use a 5:2:10 fertiliser around early September (a bit earlier this year to negate the stress following the difficult summer) to focus on strength.

Probably 80% of my feed is liquid-based, and we spoon-feed

every ten to fourteen days. I find it easier to tailor to both weather and golfing requirements that way.

We used to spray every thirty days, roughly, and we'd get to the end of the cycle and find that the coverage was less than we'd hoped - whether that's feed, bio-stimulant, wetting agent, or whatever - so we decided to halve the rate and double the applications. It improves timing and coverage.

The course is twenty-five years old, and was built a few years before I started working at PHGC. I knew, upon arrival, that there were problems with infiltration on certain greens from working with the course manager at the time whilst trying to learn about the site.

There were three problem greens (two were completely rebuilt soon after the course was opened) and the remaining green has been our focus for additional verti-draining, additional topdressing and drainage to the perimeter.

This green had developed a hard pan just above the gravel carpet, restricting water reaching the drains, so I brought in an Air2G2 to break that up and bring it up to speed with the rest. That worked well as we could really focus on a specific depth of the rootzone.

We also bought a pedestrian aerator two seasons ago. That's out at least monthly, using various tines and depths. Its ease of use, versatility and ability to give us access to tight areas of the course is superb and has made a huge difference to our aeration regimes across all areas of the course.

We core greens in March and



early October, to integrate as much straight-sand as possible into the profile.

As I say, I've worked here for twenty-one years, played for even longer, and my team and I know the course like the back of our hands, which is invaluable when it comes to planning projects or knowing how the site will react to certain weather conditions. My grandfather and family owned some of the lands bordering the course, right off the second tee, so the land around here is basically my home turf.

Hilton Hotels took over the course around 1999, when they acquired the previous owner, which was a Scottish hotel chain. This resulted in more investment in both the hotel and golf facilities and having one of the biggest hotel chains in the world has really helped to develop and progress the course over the years.

I'd like to give a shout-out to my hard-

working full-time team: Jim Hughes, my deputy; Kevin Wilkins, senior greenkeeper; as well as Phil Richardson and Lewis Grey, assistant greenkeepers and Ashley Maine, Gardener, as well as the whole golf team here at PHGC as it really is a team effort.

We tend to start our days around 6.00-6.30am during the summer months and 7.00-7.30am during the winter months.

There are some tasks which could be done earlier, but this is a luxury hotel, so we're restricted to not using noisy, powered machinery early in the morning, too close to the hotel.

We're pleased with all of these superb results we've been getting.

We've tackled those problem greens, and poorly draining fairways and the course just keeps getting better, year after year."



### What's in the shed?

John Deere 2500B greens mower  
 John Deere 7700 fairway mower  
 John Deere 2653B tees mower  
 John Deere 22 hand mower x 3  
 Toro 4000D rough mower  
 Toro 3250 greens mower x 2  
 Jacobsen AR3 semi-rough mower  
 Jacobsen Cushman utility vehicle  
 John Deere 4x2 Gator UTV x 2  
 Jacobsen Sand Scorpion bunker rake  
 Toro 1250 greens iron  
 Ransomes TD 1500 topdresser  
 Hardi Boss 600I sprayer  
 John Deere 3720 tractor with loader  
 John Deere 1070 tractor  
 Marstons tip trailer  
 Toro Procore 646  
 Redexim Speed Brush  
 Redexim Verti-drain  
 Wessex 8ft sweeper  
 Sisis Rotorake 600 pedestrian scarifier  
 Logic trailed fertiliser spinner  
 Sisis fairway rake/brush  
 Selection of pedestrian hand mowers  
 Selection of trimmers, Flymos, chainsaws, blowers, pole pruners etc.



## Chorley Golf Club

# Towers above the rest

Founded in 1897, Chorley Golf Club has developed a reputation of being one of the finest golf courses in the area and recent improvements to both the course and clubhouse have further enhanced its standing. Lee Williams met Head Greenkeeper **Tony Grayson** to discuss the changes

**T**his well-established golf course is set in 127 acres of rolling moorland with stunning views stretching from the South Lakes to North Wales. The 18-hole course provides an excellent challenge to both the skilled and less skilled golfer.

The aim is to provide members, guests and visitors alike with the best possible golfing experience.

I have been to Chorley Golf Club many times in the past when I worked in sales, and this is how I first got to meet Tony Grayson

the Head Greenkeeper. I was looking forward to meeting back up with him as it had been 4½ years since I last visited the course. The first thing that stands out when you turn into the car park is the beautiful old clubhouse which, along with the course itself, has a rich history behind it. This is where I met up with Tony to have a walk around the course; luckily it was a clear day, and the sun was shining. I say this because the course has some great views; as soon as you look down the first tee you are greeted with a picturesque view of Winter Hill. Walk

further round and, on a clear day, you can see Blackpool tower in the background and, if your eyes are as good as Tony's, you can also spot The Big One rollercoaster. Unfortunately, even with my glasses on, I couldn't make it out.

Tony first joined Chorley Golf Club in 1998 as Deputy Head Greenkeeper, then became Head Greenkeeper in 2000. Tony first got into greenkeeping when he was a junior golfer at Brightmet Golf Club whilst studying for his A-levels at college. After he gained his A levels, he wondered what to



do, but then fate lent a hand. Whilst at the golf club one day he was asked if he would like to help the greenkeepers, something he did for six months before qualified greenkeepers were brought in and he had to move on. He moved to Dunscar Golf Club as an assistant greenkeeper and finally to Chorley Golf Club and never looked back since. In his time spent at Chorley, he has gained NVQ levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 and holds all relevant spraying certificates.

The golf course is a mix of parkland and heathland, as Tony explains. "There are

hints of parkland in there, especially around the clubhouse, which I'm guessing may have been the gardens for the house at one point. It's just totally different, it grows like mad and is really lush. Then we have other areas that are rich with moorland grasses, I would say we try and be a heathland course. The current architect Paul Thomas, who has been working with the club, tells me this area is called Heath Charnock, so it should be a heathland course. It's a par 71, with a total yardage of 6,284 and the course is around 52 acres."



**Through the summer  
I always see bits of disease,  
but I always let it ride;  
it's growing out as quick  
as it's forming**

## What's in the shed

John Deere 2500E Greens mower  
 John Deere Fairway mower  
 Toro 4300 Groundsmaster  
 Toro 3250 Greensmaster x 2  
 Iseki Tractor  
 Ford Tractor  
 Massey Ferguson tractor with front loader  
 Tym mini tractor  
 Grasshopper zero turn  
 Dakota topdresser  
 Wiedenmann Super 500  
 Toro Sand Pro Bunker Rake  
 Team Sprayer 450 litre tractor mounted sprayer  
 Scotts Spreader



**My organic matter is at controllable levels but, saying that, we are going to hollow core a few of our more problematic greens**



Beautiful clubhouse

When it comes to staff, Tony feels lucky as they have always held onto the team. He has two supervisors Peter Doidge, thirty-six years served; John Cottam, fifteen years' service; plus two assistants –Daniel Woan, five years served; and Chris Riley currently served two years and in his second stint at the club after trying his hand at plumbing.

Since Tony joined the club, the STRI has been a constant when it comes to advising and testing. "The knowledge they have and the testing that they do, backs me up".

I know of golf courses I have visited in the past who have managed to get machinery they have been asking for through the help of a report from STRI; is this the case for you I ask Tony? "Yes, they look at what machinery you have, how many staff you

have, but luckily we have always been a team of five. We have two visits a year, one on the agronomy side and one on ecology and receive two reports."

Tony goes on to tell me that the greens are push ups. "For the last fifteen years, under the advice of the STRI, we have applied 120 tonnes, so we have quite a build-up of topdressing now. There are drill and fill channels in there which we did ten years ago when I changed holes. Now there is a layer of about three inches of topdressing on top of those channels, so that's how much we have built up."

Over the years, the team has also managed to put drains in nine of the worst greens on the course, alongside the maintenance work, this now allows the greens to be played pretty much twelve months of the year.

Tony likes to use the temporary greens, "In a frost, we generally come off, but we also come off when there is a ground frost as well when they are thawing; that is the most difficult one to get through to members."

Earlier on our course walk we had the argument of staying on summer greens all year round, even when there is a frost. "That is the debate," continued Tony. "Do you come off in frost, and what damage does it cause if you stay on, but sometimes I like to use it to give the greens a rest, because we are a busy course. You have got to question whether any damage is actually done - you never actually see the footprints but, for me, I have always been brought up with 'if it's frost, you're off'."

The greens are cut every day with a John Deere triple mower with brushes attached, but during periods of drought like last summer, they will alternate between rolling and cutting to give it a bit more protection.

Cutting heights for summer, Tony will try and get 3.25mm for the captain's and club championships, but then it will depend on the weather. In winter, he will lift it to 5mm. Throughout the season he will verti-drain at a depth of ten inches and also solid tine to a depth of three inches. He hasn't hollow cored his greens for years. "My organic



Head Greenkeeper, Tony Grayson



**‘Why do our courses not look like that?’, but if only golfers knew what went into producing that course over four days, the investment and resources available**

matter is at controllable levels but, saying that, we are going to hollow core a few of our more problematic greens.”

The greens are currently made up of 50% bents and 50% meadow grass. “We overseed every year in September with bent grasses, which seems to work well. We don’t bother with fescues as I feel we don’t have the conditions.”

Tony has soil samples taken once a year. From the results, a fertiliser programme

is drawn up. He has no strict rule on the input of phosphorus and potassium, but he specifies he wants no more than 80kg of nitrogen going down in twelve months. He starts with a granular 5:5:10 in April giving him 15kg of nitrogen, then he will go on with liquids rootmass plus, phosphorites, nitrogen, this gives 3kg of nitrogen. From June/July he will use a 15:0:0 urea-based liquid nitrogen with calcium, giving 10kg of nitrogen, alongside a wetting

agent and phosphorites throughout the summer. He finishes off with an autumn feed of a granular 5:0:27 which gives 15kg of nitrogen.

Tony tries to hold off when it comes to fungicides. He had just sprayed a preventative of Instrata at the end of September but, before that, he had sprayed with Heritage nine months previously in December.

“Through the summer I always see bits of

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## Club history

There are two aspects to the History of Chorley Golf Club as might be expected from the design of the clubhouse.

The Hall o'th' Hill at its present site was built in 1724 although the design of the building puts it in an earlier period. According to tradition, the original site is believed to have been on the moated site at Bretters Farm near the twelfth.

Transporting buildings in this way was not unusual in the 1700s as other examples have been found in Lancashire. The original Hall was a much larger building facing south. The west wing was demolished and replaced by the new hall now facing west, as it is today.

The Hall, in its current position, was built by Thomas Willis who died in 1727. The ownership of the Hall was passed down through the generations of the Willis family and, in 1890, was owned by Henry Randolph d'Anyers Willis born in 1834.

In 1897 the first Chorley Golf Club opened at Hall o'th' Hill as a nine-hole course. The course became favourable with professionals of the day, and it was pointed out that there was more ground in the vicinity on which a further nine holes could be produced.

After numerous negotiations and searches for land capable of producing an 18-hole course, it was eventually decided to purchase the Hall o'th' Hill estate. In February 1925, J A Steer, the Blackpool South Shore professional, agreed to complete his design for an 18-hole course for the sum of £25.

In June 1926, the course was opened; it would have been earlier but for the General Strike. J A Steer, one of the foremost architects in the country (courses at Bradda, Port Erin, Fairhaven and Blundellsands) summed up the course as "agreeably undulating without being very hilly."

The layout of the course is in two loops with starting places at the first and tenth, with the ninth and eighteenth greens close to the clubhouse. When there are two possible starting holes there then came the argument of "which way round". This still poses questions for members today and will probably continue into the future.

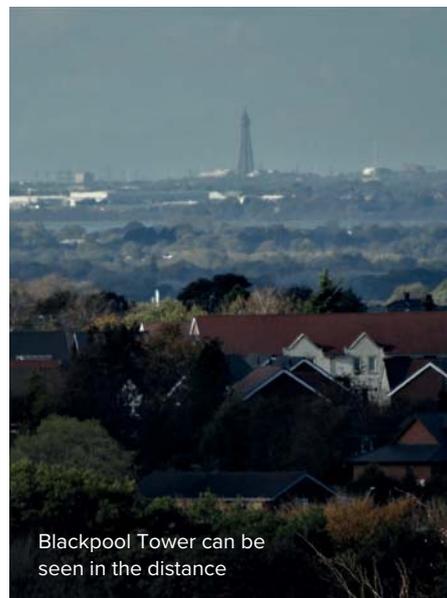
By April 1940, membership of the club stood at 84 men and 42 ladies. The times were reflected by granting courtesy of the course to visiting members of the forces, whilst members of the club who were also serving in the war had their subs waived. Some of the course fairways had to be broken up to render flat areas of ground unsafe for landing aircraft by the enemy.

Club finances did suffer during the war but due to the generosity and capability of some of the members, none more so than G B Fletcher, Captain during the War. However, much work was required to reinstate the course to its former glory.

Through the next years the course and facilities continued to improve and, by 1960, membership stood at 128 men and 73 ladies. The sixties saw many improvements to the course and the rulings regarding safety procedures while playing the course.

The eleventh tee was moved, and a protective screen set up to the left of the sixteenth tee following a "near miss". This showed an increase in the amount of traffic the course was taking, and further measures started to be taken to protect the course. By 1972, there was a waiting list of thirty members, even though subscriptions were increased vacancies being filled by selection as they occurred.

By now, the course was well established, and although improvements were made to the course, as is still the case today, attention turned towards the clubhouse.

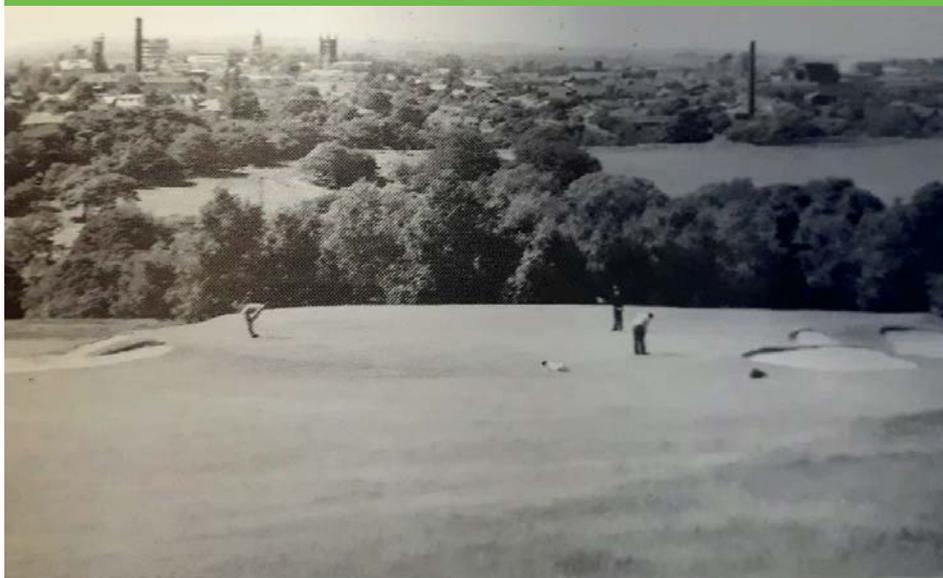


Blackpool Tower can be seen in the distance

disease, but I always let it ride; it's growing out as quick as it's forming. I would only spray if the weather conditions were looking conducive for it and it got out of hand. I have, for the first time in a long time, had some anthracnose, but you will probably hear that from a few other greenkeepers."

A regular programme of scarification is carried out at a depth of 3mm alongside a sand topdressing programme and regular aeration. This shows in the organic matter results from the three test greens. The organic matter 0-20mm is 5%, the target range is 4-6%, so they are bang in the middle with that, 20-40mm is 4% again in the target range and a pH level of 5.7. The roots are at a depth of around eight inches which Tony is more than happy with. He puts this down to the aeration programme.

As well as the greens, the tees and fairways have regular aeration programmes, and scarification is also carried out. Tony is going to start fertilising the tees in a similar way to the greens and also use Primo Maxx. "I want to try and improve the surface, so it



Renovations commence



Left to right: Peter Doidge, Chris Riley, Tony Grayson, John Cottam and Daniel Woan



**We are dealing with nature, and there are so many factors outside of our control. I don't think golfers understand the problems we all face as greenkeepers**

will withstand the wear and tear a bit more," he comments.

This winter, Tony has a few projects on the go. They have already started digging open drainage ditches in strategic places. "They are not there to try and change the golf course or become hazards; they are hidden away in tree lines. We have a member here who has been looking at the topography of the course, where the actual water is

running. With it predominantly being on clay, the water is just surface runoff. With what rain we have had, it seems to be working, so we will carry on with this work over the next few weeks."

They are also trying to take the course back to where it used to be, trees that have been planted over the years are getting bigger and starting to encroach; blocking out views and making areas of the course

wetter.

"Over the next few months, we will be felling a lot of trees and thinning out. Some of the work will be done by ourselves and the rest will be done by a tree surgeon as it's quite a big project. A lot of this is about aesthetics, opening up the vistas around the course. We are quite high up and, when you work here all the time, you take them for granted. You look at some of the views

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that are being hidden by the trees, and that's a shame; they add to the experience when playing the course."

Tony likes to use the Chorley Golf Club's Twitter account to interact with his members on a regular basis. "Every day I update the account with our morning jobs and afternoon jobs, to keep them informed about what we

are doing. In the winter, we utilise it to inform members if the course is closed or open and of any restrictions on the course. We do have an information line, but only one person at a time can get through - but on Twitter, it's literally out there."

Tony also writes a monthly blog explaining the previous month's work and

the future plans. These are emailed to all members. He likes to think that the members appreciate the updates, and it stops any speculation in the process.

When it comes to support from the golf club, Tony feels lucky to have a good greens chairman and committees behind him, especially with some of the stories he hears



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**Over the next few months, we will be felling a lot of trees and thinning out. We are quite high up and, when you work here all the time, you take them for granted**

from other clubs. "It's a worry for them. I put it down to the demands on golf courses now. I think they're asking too much, and they have to realise we are dealing with a living thing in grass. We are dealing with nature, and there are so many factors outside of our control. I don't think golfers understand the problems we all face as greenkeepers."

"Golfers see these tournaments on TV and think 'why do our courses not look like that?', but if only they knew what went into producing that course over four days, the investment and resources available."

Tony recalls; "When I first started here, they had eighteen temporary greens which we cut all the way through the summer, so

they were ready for winter. When the time came, they went on them all winter. They weren't happy about it, but that's how it was and, if the course was shut, golfers had a bit to say but, in the end, they just accepted it. Now it seems to have changed to where they want summer conditions in winter; it's just making the job more difficult."

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## Søllerød Golfklub

# Danish hygge!

**Andrew Dadge** is the Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Søllerød Golfklub in Denmark, a role he took up in March 2018. In this question and answer session, he tells us more about his work in one of the most economically and socially developed countries in the world



**Pitchcare: How did you get into the industry and where did you work prior to your current position?**

Andrew Dadge: I started as a seasonal worker at Furesø Golfklub in Denmark. When they asked me to be an apprentice I jumped at the opportunity. I was with Furesø for eleven years, before taking on a new challenge at several courses and a private estate in Surrey.

**What training and education did you undertake?**

I took my NVQ 2 through Myerscough College and then several follow up courses with Danish colleges. Also, I am fully qualified to operate a chainsaw and also to use a chainsaw while climbing.

**Was there one person who inspired you?**

I've been lucky enough to work under some very talented head greenkeepers, but my first boss, Hans Beurling, was a pioneer in Danish greenkeeping. He was a solid influence on me as a young apprentice.

I consider our club's current Head Greenkeeper, Mads Andersen, as a mentor to me as we have worked together for over ten years.

**Are you responsible for budgets or do you report to someone else - for example a greens chairman or committee?**

Budget is the head greenkeeper's responsibility, but I hope to learn more about the process in the oncoming years.

**Can you tell us a little bit about the course?**

The club was founded in 1972 and today has approximately 1,200 active and 400 passive members.

It's an open parkland course, that has an almost typical English look. The main 18-hole course is a par 72, 5,993 metres (6,554 yards). We also have a 9-hole par 3 course and a driving range. The total area covers roughly 173 acres (70 hectares).

The driving range is fully automated with a mowing robot and a ball-picking robot.

**What are your staffing levels?**

We have a full-time staff of four, plus an apprentice and one seasonal helper.



**In Denmark, the greenkeeping industry is unionised, and the wages are fair and adequate. We are an up-and-coming nation on the golf and greenkeeping scene, whereas England has always been a leader in the industry, but the employees are being left behind due to lack of support and resources**



Our apprentice is coming along well. We enjoy having the opportunity to teach a person who is eager to learn more about greenkeeping as part of our team.

We believe that all employees should be able to do all jobs, and we strive to have a solid rotation when handling the weekly task list. I believe that this also makes for a better work environment.

We follow the guidelines of current legislation and make sure we stay up to date. Every year, the Danish Greenkeeper's Union offers a 3-day seminar full of info, training and education. We also assist our employees when looking to enrol in further education or courses.

We don't currently employ a health and safety officer, but the head greenkeeper and myself are responsible for first aid.

We are hoping to employ a workshop technician in the future. Currently, servicing and machinery maintenance is outsourced for now.

**Do you and your staff attend industry shows, seminars, demo days, road shows?**

Yes, when appropriate, we attend local course walkarounds, trade shows and seminars.

**How would you describe the soil profile generally and how were the greens and tees constructed?**

We have a mixture of clay and sand. Our greens are push up, but topdressing over the years has provided us with a top layer that drains and performs well. The tees have not received the same amount of topdressing and that's something we will be concentrating on.

**What are your maintenance regimes?**

Previously, the greens were maintained mostly as poa greens with large amounts of N and water. This resulted in 8-9% organic material in the top 20mm.

We have started a good aeration and topdressing programme, but





also lowering the N output to try and get the greens back to a healthier state. We also overseed with fescue and colonial bent.

With the exception of one green, we have a reasonably open course with a fair amount of undulation which provides good airflow.

We use temporary greens during the winter months to reduce wear and tear.

The cutting height for greens is 4mm, for

tees and approaches we cut at 10mm, fairways are 15mm and semi-rough is 1.5 inches.

Regular soil samples are taken, mainly on greens, to monitor thatch levels.

Our aeration programme this season has consisted of seven passes with solid tines on the Toro ProCore, one pass with hollow core tines, followed by overseeding twice,

once after the ProCore and once at the end of the season, followed by one pass with an Air2G2. We scarified the greens four times, just to give the surface more air and to thin out the playing surface.

Danish legislature prohibits the use of most herbicides and fungicides. Our land is owned by Skov og Naturstyrelsen (Forest and Nature Conservation Department), so



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**Danish winters see frost on a regular basis, but we now seem to see more extremes in the weather - heavier rainfall, showers more often, higher temperatures, more uninterrupted sunshine - in the past ten years**



### What's in the shed?

Toro 4700 semi-rough mower

Baroness fairway mower

John Deere fairway mowers

Jacobsen Eclipse greens mower

John Deere 2500E greens mowers

John Deere 2500E for tees and approaches

John Deere 2500 with scarifying units

Smithco greens roller

John Deere utility vehicles

John Deere 4720 tractor

John Deere ProGator mounted with a Hardi sprayer

"Machines are sourced via local Danish dealerships. We have purchased some machines outright, others on a lease, as well as second-hand when it is reliable.

We are not loyal to one manufacturer; we find the right machine for the right job, which is more important. But I am a Toro-man myself.

The Smithco greens roller and our Baroness fairway mower have made an impact on our playing surfaces.

We hired an Air2G2 for an autumn aeration pass.

All the above are washed down with a recently purchased Waste2Water system.

What would my wish list include? New greens, tees and approach mowers and a turbine blower would be at the top of my list."

we must also abide by their local legislation which is even stricter. Therefore, we are challenged to control any diseases, insects and weeds with natural and mechanical remedies.

#### What end of season and ongoing renovations do you undertake?

Overseeding and verti-draining of the greens, tees and fairways - as well as bunker maintenance and path renovations - all happen in the late summer/autumn.

#### Are renovations affected by budgets?

Yes, the amount of seed and topdressing used is often dictated by the amount we have budgeted for.

#### Does the course suffer from any regular natural occurrences such as flooding, high winds, excessive snowfall/frosts, drought etc?

Danish winters see frost on a regular basis, but we now seem to see more extremes in the weather - heavier rainfall, showers more often, higher temperatures, more uninterrupted sunshine - in the past ten years.

In 2017, the course was affected strongly by frequent and heavy downpours, which was contrasted by a severely dry summer last year so, like many courses in Northern Europe, we have had to adjust our duties to meet expectations.

Presentation ranks high, but it is not always easy to put presentation at the top of the agenda as we are a limited size workforce and completing other tasks may be more important.

As we are in a protected area and are not able to add more drainage solutions, to help dry our fairways we have added 400 tonnes of fairway topdressing to the management plan, for future seasons. Also in the future, when combatting drought, we would like to update our irrigation system.

#### That leads us on nicely to your environmental policy. Is this important and what do you have in place?

I think it is very important for our course to consider any potential impact on the surrounding areas, including wild animals and plant life.





Our local environmental agency has put environmental policies in place. We work closely with Skov og Naturstyrelsen (Forest and Nature Conservation Department) and the local council.

At the start of the 2018 season we hired a consultant from STRI to prepare a report on the current state of our course.

Due to local legislation, we are restricted to the amount of work we can do to ponds and

wooded areas, but we are constantly in contact with Skov og Naturstyrelsen to discuss solutions and practices.

**How do you interact with your club members - for example, regular newsletters, notice board or course walks?**

We offer email newsletters as well as having an electronic notice board at our clubhouse and we often update our webpage.

**Are you working on any special projects at the moment?**

We are in the planning phase of a complete bunker and green surrounds redesign, working with architect Philip Spogard of Spogard & Vandervaart. We are also looking to update our irrigation system.

We will be beginning construction of our new greenkeeper's compound in the very near future!

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# Getting Personal

## Andrew Dadge - he can get a bit 'hangry' when driving

**Who are you?** Andrew Dadge, 31, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Søllerød Golfklub. Born in England, moved to Denmark as a young child.

**Family status?** Married to my lovely wife, Lindsay.

**Who's your hero and why?** Both my dad, and my step-dad for being solid role models.

**What would you change about yourself?** I get "hangry" often.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** I'm obsessed with leather boots and I like bad Steven Segal movies.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** Getting the chance to become the Deputy at Søllerød.

**What are your pet peeves?** Middle-lane drivers, when my wife leaves wet towels on the bed, and golfers who don't respect the etiquette of the game.

**If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be?** Fiji, with a pitstop in Tokyo.

**What's the best part of your job?** I really enjoy working outside, and the early finish hours.

**... and the worst?** Golfers who don't respect etiquette, and the early starts in the morning.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** To have a family and a really nice car.

**Which three albums would you take to a desert island?** Oasis - Definitely Maybe; Kasabian's first album, Kendrick Lamar - Damn.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** Luke Bracken.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Go travelling with my family.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** George Best, my dad (because he would like to meet George Best again) and Liam Gallagher.

**If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why?** Ian Poulter on the Sunday of the Ryder Cup.

**Do you have any bad habits? I get road rage from time to time, anything else, ask my wife!**

**... or any good ones?** I'm always on time, I always carry the shopping, I always offer to buy a round.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** From time to time, it would depend on the task.

**What are you reading at the moment? - Hard copy or online?** I'm really into Podcasts right now - I recommend Ear Shuffle.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Treat people the way you want to be treated.

**What's your favourite smell?** Bacon on a Sunday morning, after a weekend shift.

**What do you do in your spare time?** I enjoy a cold beverage, and I watch TV, especially Premier League.

**What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked?** A few days after my boss had returned from volunteering at the Ryder Cup this year, I was out spraying fertiliser and a member asked me if that "was something fancy he (my boss) had learned in France"?

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** I do enjoy a trip around the course on the bunker rake.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Reliable, loyal, thirsty.

**What talent would you like to have?** Skateboarding.

**What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?** I would like to see minimum standards in contracts for the average greenkeeper raised.



Previous projects have included the automation of the driving range, which is a relatively new feature which our members benefit from.

**Do you source additional help or is the work done in-house?**

Our fairway top dressing and rough harvesting was outsourced this season.

**How do you undertake pest and weed control?**

Due to Danish legislation, we use a chemical-free and mechanical approach. This has its challenges but also adds a level of interest when solving problems.

This season we have struggled with Brown Patch and Anthracnose and, with the local regulations, there are no chemical or biological aids which we can use. We have been attempting to find a suitable solution to this problem whilst adhering to local guidelines.

There is a thriving mole population, which can be a nuisance and we also struggle with worm casts on fairways.

We topdress our fairways to combat the worm casts but, as for the moles, we use traps, but it doesn't always work because they are sneaky!

**What would you consider to be the state of our industry?**

I found that my time working in England has shed some light on the issues greenkeepers face there, such as lower pay, lack of

contracts, pension schemes and lack of unions.

In Denmark, the greenkeeping industry is unionised, and the wages are fair and adequate. We are an up-and-coming nation on the golf and greenkeeping scene, whereas England has always been a leader in the industry, but the employees are being left behind due to lack of support and resources. Many of them are moving out of the golf industry and into lawn care, private estates, etc. to earn a better wage and work in better conditions.

I think the golf industry in England, as well as BIGGA, should step up and do more to support the average worker in terms of offering job security and leading change.

**Are we undervalued?**

I think it can be a thankless job at times, but we are an integral part of golf and that is why working for a respectful employer is so important.

**How would you raise our profile?**

Networking and education are helpful factors to educate others about the complexity of our roles in the clubs. We offer email newsletters as well as having an electronic notice board at our clubhouse, and we often update our webpage.



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## Trinity College, Cambridge

# Dutch Master

Dutchman **Tom Hooijenga** began his career with the Parks Department of his native country, before working for the National Trust and English Heritage. Blair Ferguson chats with him to find out what drew him to work at one of the UK's premier educational facilities



“

**I was mad about English gardens, especially the traditional English cottage garden. I was reading about Lutyens, Jekyll and Vita Sackville-West - I went to Dutch bookshops and purposely bought books in English about those architects and gardeners**

Modern life can be hectic and full of pressure, something those who work within the professional turf industry know all too well. Many feel this pressure from the teams they work for or members they maintain courses for but, at Trinity College, Cambridge, the valuable green space created by Head Gardener, Tom Hooijenga is seen as a refuge for busy minds.

The grand buildings and gardens that make up this impressive College have been in place since Henry VIII founded the establishment in 1546 by merging two existing colleges and seven hostels together. Now, these extensive grounds sit in the middle of a city that has grown around the Colleges of Cambridge, with many

students and tourists passing by, on foot, bicycle or even by punt, on the river Cam that flows through the Backs.

But, for the 685 undergraduates, 384 graduates and more than 180 Fellows, Trinity is home, and the thirty-six acres of gardens are a crucial element of the College environment; a space for thinking, reflection, sporting activity and social occasions. The many uses of the grounds add to the pressure on Trinity's 12-strong gardens team. But, as Tom explains, they are more than up to the job.

It's clear, as Tom shows us around, that he is perfectly suited to a Cambridge College - and perhaps his career had all along been preparing him to look after the grounds in such a historical institution.

Tom said: "I was interested in horticulture from a young age and I picked up a lot at home from what my father was doing. He looked after a good sized garden at an old people's home, and he did a lot of the technical side as well."

"I used to join him after school and slowly got more and more interested. I felt I was either going to get into forestry or horticulture. When I left secondary school I decided on gardening."

"I went to horticultural college in Holland and gained an HND in Horticulture on the maintenance and construction of gardens. It was a good education because it was so broad. We did garden design and maintenance, and we learnt about a lot of plants."



The pristine lawns of The Great Court



Tom Hooijenga



The Great Court

Tom began his career with the Parks Department in Holland, working in two cities, Schagen and Alkmaar. It was during holidays to England that his interest in and love of English gardens blossomed.

“I was mad about English gardens, especially the traditional English cottage garden. I was reading about Lutyens, Jekyll and Vita Sackville-West - I went to Dutch bookshops and purposely bought books in English about those architects and gardeners.”

During one of these trips, Tom got chatting to the owner of a private garden in Sussex and the seeds were sown for him to leave Holland. He became a gardener at the National Trust’s Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, followed by fourteen years at Bodnant Garden in North Wales.

He then took up an unexpected opportunity to manage the 100-acre grounds of a chateau in Brittany for three and a half years.

England lured him back with a job at English Heritage where they would visit other gardens as part of professional best practice. Tom was particularly struck by a visit to Waddesdon Manor, which is managed by the Rothschild Foundation on behalf of the National Trust. “It made such an impact. It reminded me of the atmosphere of working on a private estate - there is a relatively small management structure. You have responsibilities and yet there is a freedom to it. You’re all working for the same end.”

So, when Tom saw the job of Head Gardener at Trinity, he was keen to return to working as he had done previously, on private estates.

“Coming to Trinity reminded me of how private estates are run. This is a prestigious educational institution with thirty-six acres of gardens. The decisions are made by Fellows who live and work here. As Head Gardener, I have a committee to report to, I attend a budget meeting annually and, once the budget is approved, my team of gardeners and I can get on with the work. It’s a great



Planting out in Burrell's Field



Leaf collecting

way of working. Now we have a good team of committed and enthusiastic gardeners at various stages of their careers.”

Tom arrived at Trinity at a good moment. The Senior Gardeners had had a say in what they needed and wanted from the Head Gardener. And the College was looking for fresh blood and new ideas, as well as significant management and leadership experience.

“Today, the team comprises me, the

Deputy Head Gardener and three Senior Gardeners who each look after a particular area. Before I came, the team had looked after the grounds very well so there wasn't a backlog of maintenance.”

Of course, Tom did make changes, but gradually. Then, various new and challenging projects came on stream.

New Court, the nineteenth century court of student accommodation and staff offices, underwent a major refurbishment which,

when completed, left the external walls bare of any planting.

“It was a challenge, but we had a blank canvas and that was exciting. I didn't want to repeat past planting schemes, so we introduced a lot of new climbers and shrubs that would flower in different seasons.”

“Underplanting in the narrow beds outside each room in New Court was also important. The plants needed to be fairly robust as parking is allowed. We created a



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**Introducing new colours was important to me to liven it up for the students and Fellows and I think that is important because you could see the reaction from people once they saw it and saw what the potential was**



Scarifying the Fellows' Bowling Green



The Fellows' Garden

new colour scheme too, which students and Fellows appreciated."

"Introducing new colours was important to me to liven it up for the students and Fellows and I think that is important because you could see the reaction from people once they saw it and saw what the potential was. Even if you did the bedding schemes with slightly different views, not just annual plants, but think what a half hardy or subtropical would do and plant some bananas or a castor oil plant. People see those changes and then you get the response of 'you've really turned that around, that's freshened it up' and that's because it got stale, because if you repeat it the same as it's always been it fades, and it becomes a safe bet that isn't exciting anymore."

"The feel of the place is far more immediate now and I think, when you do bedding schemes and things like that, it keeps on changing and is different the following year. You could say that the feel of it changes because the way it looks and

develops. We can be proud if we've made a difference."

Tom has introduced bench seating beneath the old horse chestnut tree in the circular plot of grass in the centre of New Court. These benches are accessed by granite setts; by next summer, wildflowers will bloom, providing a haven for wildlife - and a pleasant spot for students, staff and Fellows.

Tom has achieved significant improvements in the gardens at Trinity - new planting schemes and seating being just a few of his many changes.

"You could see from the reactions of students and Fellows that they appreciated these changes. In some beds we've mixed half hardy and tropical plants - such as Abyssinian bananas and castor oil plants - for summer planting schemes, and that's really got a positive response."

But it hasn't all been plain sailing. At a College whose history dates back 700 years, there can be tension between tradition and modernity. Only Fellows can



**The feel of the place is far more present now and I think, when you do bedding schemes and things like that, it keeps on changing and is different the following year**



Burrell's Field



Intimate seating areas are worth the effort

walk on the grass in Great Court and Neville's Court, and they can have strong views about horticultural matters.

One matter they do agree on is the importance of Trinity's lawns.

The grass areas make up ten acres of the 36-acre grounds and they feature heavily in Tom's plans for long-term improvement. The various lawns serve numerous purposes at different times of the year. The Fellows' Bowling Green, which lies hidden behind a high wall, has been in use since being laid out in 1647, whilst the two large areas either

side of The Avenue - the North and South Paddocks - are host to marquees and music stages for the annual May Ball. A large marquee is also erected on the grass in Neville's Court for the event.

So there are lots of challenges for Trinity's lawns, but Tom has a long-term plan in place, with new seed mixtures, inputs and better turf maintenance.

"The lawns are the key area where I want to make a significant impact. In 2018, we distributed 30 tonnes of topdressing - that's something we want to do regularly to make

//

**We have gone from heavy pedestrian machinery that only one or two people could use to more nimble machines on the cylinder mower side and found they are a lot nicer to operate**

the lawns healthier. We're also talking to suppliers and getting a new grass seed mixture. It's quite a challenge but, if we pull it off, we'll have a stronger sward in the years to come. In the next four years I expect to see some results."

To help with turf maintenance, the College has invested in a Baroness aerator and a verti-cutter to go behind the compact tractors, and a Redexim overseeder.

"We have gone from heavy pedestrian machinery that only one or two people could use to more nimble machines on the

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**I might use an eight-blade cylinder and they might use a 12-blade cylinder, but the machine is still doing the same thing and the outcome is the same**



The Nevile's Court lawn



Welcome to The Jungle!

cylinder mower side and found they are a lot nicer to operate. I've invested in Locke cylinder mowers that are American built and have a floating head, and it's changed our cutting as more people are happy to step behind it because it's so easy to operate."

"A lot of it is looking at machines that are used on sports turf and thinking how they can be implemented on fine turf and we recently did that with an aeration machine. I might use an eight-blade cylinder and they might use a 12-blade cylinder, but the machine is still doing the same thing and the outcome is the same."

Using machinery to make improvements has been a trend throughout Tom's career and keeping up to date with the latest technology is important to him.

"It's vital to keep up to date by visiting exhibitions and talking to people," says Tom. "Reading publications is crucial too because there are always new ideas; that's also why going to demo days to see machinery is important because it gets you thinking differently."

Trinity offers some unique challenges for modern machinery. The access to the main College is the historic Avenue, through a gateway. The Fellows' Garden and modern student accommodation is across busy Queen's Road. Equally, modern equipment can be in keeping with the College environment.

"We've invested in a lot of battery-operated kit for when we're in sensitive areas like the Courts and that's been a step forward in technology that's helped us. So, it's hedge cutting and leaf blowing that we can do with less noise and it makes them less tiresome to work with," Tom explains.

"One of the best machines we acquired recently was an Avant 635 multi-tool. It saved us an enormous amount of time when we had to distribute 90 tonnes of soil in New Court after the refurbishment. If we didn't have that machine, then it would have been backbreaking - it's a good example of making what we do more efficient. You could say 'I need another five gardeners on site', but if you haven't got that then you can



**We've invested in a lot of battery-operated kit for when we're in sensitive areas and that's been a step forward in technology. So, it's hedge cutting and leaf blowing that we can do with less noise and it makes them less tiresome to work with**



The historic Avenue



Tree work in the Fellows' Garden



**I've done some research and raised it with the Garden Committee and they want to see the idea developed further, so now I need to look at the priorities for irrigation, which are Great Court and Nevile's Court**

invest in the right type of machinery and it makes all the difference."

Investing in the future is a common thread. Tom has created wildflower meadows to encourage butterflies and enabled beehives beside the plant nursery - just two examples of his environmental focus. There are bigger projects in the pipeline too.

The searing heat of summer 2018 has passed and Trinity's lawns have recovered, but the existing irrigation methods are being reviewed as Tom thinks increased temperatures might become common.

"We need to start planning for that situation again because I'd hate to see the lawns go brown every summer. So we're in the early stages of considering a rainwater harvesting system."

"During the summer that's just gone, it became obvious we needed some form of irrigation after seeing the lawns die back as they did and a lot of the grass areas turning brown. What makes Great Court what it is are the lawns. They are what people see, so it's crucial that you've got green grass in that space and, with climate change, it could well be that this hot summer wasn't a fluke, we might get more summers like it."

"I thought we needed to start planning for that situation because I'd hate to see it go brown every single year in July until September because it doesn't look right to me. To prevent it, we need to make water available for when we need it and that's where the idea for irrigation has come from."

"I've done some research and raised it with the Garden Committee and they want to see the idea developed further, so now I need to look at the priorities for irrigation, which are Great Court and Nevile's Court. We are only allowed to dig so many centimetres deep and archaeologists may be required. If we could work with some flat tanks, that might be simpler."

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- Pellenc telescopic hedgecutter
- Pellenc leafblowers x 2
- Pellenc brushcutter
- Stihl brushcutter
- Stihl pole chainsaw



Cutting South Paddock with an Amazone Profihopper

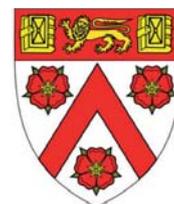
site because it's not all treated as fine turf. For example, the Fellows' Garden is cut with a ride-on rotary with a slightly higher cut. The finer turf in the Courts is cut with pedestrian cylinder mowers. So, for some areas we wouldn't look at irrigation."

Always innovating, a project that should come to fruition in 2019 is a new flower bed that represents the diversity of the College. "We're planting the bulbs now and, in spring, it will be visible from the river, so the public should be able to see it. It's quite an exciting project, but we're keeping the details under wraps for now."

Tom's enthusiasm and pride for Trinity's grounds can be seen in the immaculate presentation of the striped lawns and smart borders, shrubs and hedges, which together

create a very special environment. His passion for the gardens hints at even better things to come for a College that has been home to the likes of Sir Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon and six British Prime Ministers. And, like each of them in their time at Trinity, Tom is still learning.

"Horticulture is my passion and it doesn't stop; you are always learning," he said. "It's constantly changing - with new plants, ways of doing things, and new machinery. It isn't just doing the many different tasks needed in grounds like these, it's about creating something unique."



A new project, currently under wraps, will be visible from the River Cam



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## Benenden School

# 300 glorious acres - Lee's hold

Looking after the vast grounds at one of the country's foremost independent schools for girls is a truly challenging task. Neville Johnson went there to meet the man on the spot charged with the job of keeping presentation in top order, everywhere

**K**entish Wealden countryside is the setting for this boarding school for girls, founded back in 1923. It has over 500 pupils between 11 and 18, and perhaps its most famous alumni is HRH, the Princess Royal.

Its close on 300-acre grounds of woodland, parkland, sports fields and gardens are known as Hemsted Park which, to put into historical perspective, is recorded as being gifted to Odo, Earl of Kent, by his half brother William the Conqueror. Odo's

claim to fame is that he is probably the man who commissioned the Bayeux Tapestry. Looking at an aerial shot of the grounds a thousand years on they are a tapestry of countryside excellence - a perfect mixture of natural and formal.

The man responsible for keeping it so is Head of Grounds and Gardens, Lee Keeler. It's outside the school's focal point, a listed Victorian mansion once-owned just before the First World War by newspaper magnate Harold Harmsworth, later Lord Rothermere, where he introduces himself.

We make our way to the groundcare HQ, walking along Lime Avenue, which, as its name suggests, is bounded on each side by tall, stately lime trees.

"These had, until recently, stood in dull and often mudded surroundings," he told me. "Transforming this into raised borders and lawns was a project that we recently conducted for the school, and we're very proud of what we achieved."

Lee began his working life as an agricultural engineer, which these days stands him in good stead occasionally when



Aerial view of Benenden, illustrating the extent and beauty of its near 300-acre grounds

there's a machine glitch. He then did a spell as a greenkeeper at Dale Hill Golf Club at Wadhurst in East Sussex. It was here about twenty years ago that, in his words, he fell in love with the science of groundcare.

An opportunity to join the grounds team at Kent's Ashford School, an independent co-educational establishment, came his way and he then spent fourteen happy years there, the last six as Head of Grounds.

Four years ago however, a position was advertised at Benenden and it very much appealed to him. His application was

successful and he took up the appointment as its Head of Grounds and Gardens. It was his experience of both soft and hard landscaping in a school environment that got him the job. He's just as likely to be snow clearing the Benenden roadways as preparing pitches for play.

Lee has a team of three working for him: Billy Blackford, Michael Tompsett, and Beverley Mortley, who is specifically responsible for the horticultural side of groundcare.

Lee takes his working brief from the



Lee Keeler, Head of Grounds and Gardens, Benenden School



Lacrosse action on the new all-weather surface



The impressive Lime Tree Walk; a recent project

school's Estates Bursar Fred Davies, and they meet fortnightly to discuss all matters that relate to grounds upkeep. He says he has an excellent working relationship with the school's sports staff too.

Lacrosse is, by a long way, the school's main winter sport, and it excels at it. It has always been a key part of the non-academic curriculum here.

The sport of lacrosse is bigger across the Atlantic than it is here and, in Canada, it is the official summer sport. It was first introduced in England back in 1876 and has since then been a winter game on grass predominantly. Actually, there are a number of different versions of the sport. For men, field lacrosse and the indoor box lacrosse are body contact games, whereas, the women's 12-a-side game, and what is played at Benenden, is a non-contact game.

There are six grass pitches in all to cater for the school's eighteen lacrosse teams, many of whom compete in the National Schools Tournament. Over the years, Benenden teams across all the age groups

have won many national trophies and are frequently crowned Kent County Champions. In 2017, its first team were National Schools Champions. Many a pupil has gone on to achieve international representation. Head of lacrosse at the school is Catherine Gaunt, who was England goalkeeper for ten years. The sport is taken very seriously here.

Lee says that all of the lacrosse pitches drain well naturally, even though the land is clay-based. He and his team do regular slitting and aeration to minimise adverse surface effects of exceptional over winter rainfall.

"Normally, during the lacrosse season, rotation of pitches is necessary to cater for fixture pressure and wet conditions, but for once this is not so," said Lee.

"This year, and we're already deep into winter weeks, surfaces have held up better than they usually do; I reckon because of the exceptionally dry summer we had. In fact, playing conditions haven't been better."

"The place might have looked less than verdant during the summer holidays, but



**This year, and we're already deep into winter weeks, surfaces have held up better than they usually do; I reckon because of the exceptionally dry summer we had. In fact, playing conditions haven't been better**



At the focal point of the School's rose garden l-r: Billy Blackford, Beverley Mortley, Michael Tompsett and Lee Keeler



One of the lacrosse pitches, arcs, fans and hash marks done and ready for play



**Once you have the geometry right, it's very straightforward. The markings are a very important part of the game, perhaps more so than other field games. It's essential to have them just right**

strangely we're benefitting now."

Lee has pretty much all the equipment he is likely to need on site, and very rarely has to call in other resources.

As far as cutting for lacrosse play, he says it's usually down to 12mm and he has a number of ride-on options to cover this regular job.

Presentation for appearance is important for Benenden's lacrosse pitches, but even more so for the extensive lawn surrounds of

the teaching and administration areas that, striped, look impressive, even on a far from bright late November day. It plays a big part in the way the school has to look at all times.

Lee had had no previous experience of lacrosse pitch care. How did he manage with the pitch markings: the 12-metre arc, the 8-metre fan with its hash marks, and the crease around each goal?

"Once you have the geometry right, it's very straightforward. The markings are a

very important part of the game, perhaps more so than other field games. It's essential to have them just right, he said."

A new all-weather pitch and 320-seat stand and pavilion were added to the school's sports facilities a couple of years ago. These were officially opened by television personality Davina McCall in September 2016. Lacrosse is still very much a grass game, but it was after their first season of extended training time on this

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**I keep reminding my colleagues to take a step back every so often and think how lucky we are to work in such an environment. It's important that we try and avoid having blinkered vision of things**



Presentation is everything at Benenden...



... and the lawn areas are always hand cut

new pitch that Benenden's 1st lacrosse team won the National Schools Championship. It's now part of Lee's remit too, though he's happy to admit that it's a machine-based job rather than a science-based one.

Cricket is a distinct possibility in the future at Benenden, but as yet there is no square. It's a prospect Lee looks forward to, since he has experience of working on cricket pitches from his time at Ashford School.

The Benenden grounds were badly affected by the so-called hurricane of October 1987 when apparently about 250 trees were lost. It is still an impressive mixed landscape of trees and open parkland as you drive into the grounds and, as autumn blends into winter, a huge priority for Lee and his team is leaf clearing, just about everywhere. Composting bays made out of railway sleepers see that the tonnes that are gathered up are re-used by feeding back into the gardens on a 3-year cycle.

Lee has also been working with the local Parish Council on the maintenance and

redirection of public footpaths that cross the school's grounds. His work is nothing if not varied.

There's an obvious collective pride among the grounds team in the surroundings at Benenden. Lee encapsulates it by saying:

"I keep reminding my colleagues to take a step back every so often and think how lucky we are to work in such an environment. It's important that we try and avoid having blinkered vision of things."

"We always have to imagine what everyone else sees here. That certainly helps us focus on the job and get things right."



Mowing one of the lacrosse pitches



Part of the job now for Lee and his team - looking after the all-weather hockey and lacrosse pitch

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## Tranmere Rovers

# The youth of today eh!

The departure of Tranmere Rovers head groundsman left the Prenton Park pitch being maintained by two teenagers. But, as **Lee Williams** discovers, the two lads are both competent and ambitious to succeed

## NorthWest Powerhouse SPECIAL FEATURE

The North West of England is home to five top flight teams. But what is life like for the region's lower league groundsman who can only dream of the extensive budgets available to their lofty neighbours? Lee Williams visits four such clubs to find out



**T**ranmere Rovers Football Club is a professional association football club based in Birkenhead, Merseyside. Founded in 1884 as Belmont Football Club, they adopted their current name in 1885. They were a founder member of Division Three North in 1921 and were a member of The Football League until 2015 when they were relegated to the National League, the fifth tier of English football. On 12th May 2018, they beat Boreham Wood in the 2017-18 National League play off final to regain their status as a Football League member.

Prenton Park is the home ground of Tranmere Rovers FC, Liverpool FC Women and Liverpool FC Reserves. Its main tenant, Tranmere Rovers, moved here in 1912. The

ground has had several rebuilds, with the most recent occurring in 1995 in response to the requirement of the Taylor Report to become all-seater. Today's stadium holds 16,587 in four stands: the Kop, the Johnny King Stand, the Main Stand and the Cowshed (for away supporters).

Attendances at the ground have fluctuated over its hundred-year history. Its largest-ever crowd was 24,424 for a 1972 FA Cup match between Tranmere and Stoke City. In 2010, an average of 5,000 fans attended each home game.

I arrive at Prenton Park on a rather chilly and windy day. Outside the club shop, I first meet up with Callum Robinson, eighteen years old, one of two young groundsmen who tend to the pitches at Tranmere. After

# Getting Personal

## Callum Robinson - everything Liverpool and truly dedicated to his job

**Who are you?** Callum Robinson. I am one of two groundsmen for Tranmere Rovers.

**Family status.** In a lengthy relationship.

**Who's your hero and why?** I've idolised Steven Gerrard since I was three and I was lucky enough to meet him when we hosted Liverpool U23s last year.

**What would you change about yourself?** To stop stressing when things don't go to plan.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** Curry rice and chips from the chippy.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** It's split between two. I'd say the first time I stepped onto the pitch at Anfield or the first time I stepped onto the pitch at Wembley. Both were incredible.

**What are your pet peeves?** Leaving Mohawks after mowing or wonky mowing lines/markings lines.

**If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be?** To Anfield ... I can't stay away from the place.

**What's the best part of your job?** It would definitely be summer time. Nothing beats the first cut on a newly renovated pitch. The best time for a groundsman in my opinion.

**... and the worst?** It has to be the winter. Not having under-soil heating means moving frost covers on and off which isn't my idea of fun.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** I hope to be involved at one of the facilities at Liverpool, but I just have to keep working hard and see where it takes me.

**Favourite record, and why?** Belter by Gerry Cinnamon. We listen to it on the coach following Liverpool to away games and it gets the lads bouncing around. Gives out good vibes.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** My girlfriend.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Buy new machinery for the pitch.



**If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why?** Drums, because I'm very loud and annoying.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** Steven Gerrard, Lionel Messi and my girlfriend (just in case she reads this).

**If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why?** Probably Dave Roberts (Liverpool, Grounds Manager). He is in charge of maintaining my favourite team's pitch. We share the same passion for the same job and I would love to be in charge of Anfield for a day.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** It depends what the weather's like! If it's dry, the day is pretty much a normal one, but if it's raining or snowing it changes everything.

**What are you reading at the moment?** I don't read at all as I don't get much time. The closest I come to reading is fertiliser brochures.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** It's one of Karl Standley's quotes for his team; "Being challenged is inevitable, being defeated is optional."

**What do you do in your spare time?** Sleep.

**What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked? Is it astro?**

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** Allett C34 Buffalo.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Hard working, consistent, a bit slow in the head.

**What talent would you like to have?** Fly, to take birdseye view pictures of the pitch.

**What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?** No goalkeepers in the goalmouths.



a brief walk through the stadium, we walk out onto the pitch, where I meet Aaron Wilson, eighteen years old (groundsman) who was divoting away. After a brief chat, we leave Aaron to carry on the good work whilst Callum takes me for a walk around the facilities before we sit down for a conversation in the media office that overlooks the pitch.

Callum and Aaron have both worked at the club for a year and a half. Callum tells me they both studied sports science in the college which is based in the North Stand of the ground. From the stand, they would see the groundsmen working on the pitch.

"I would stay behind after class and watch them work, I was always interested in how they put the patterns on the pitch."

On a careers day at college he was asked what he wanted to be in life. "I told them I would like to try being a groundsman, so they put me on a day release here. I started by cleaning the linemarkers and machinery. I then moved on to the Honda rotary mowers cleaning up the debris on the pitch. Whilst on the Hondas, I thought 'yes, I am really into this'."

Callum then started to do volunteer work





**It's nice to have someone willing to support you and who you can turn to, to ask questions**

on the pitch on match days, working with the groundsman, and this is when he took the opportunity to ask if there were any jobs available. Luckily for Callum, they were looking for an apprentice. This gave him the opportunity he was looking for and he has not looked back since.

Aaron got his opportunity through Callum "He asked me if I knew if anyone was taking on for the summer. I suggested he came here to help us out. He did that and ended

up on the same apprenticeship as me, and it has worked out well for him."

They have both recently started working towards an NVQ level 2 in Sports Turf Maintenance at Reaseheath College and would like to get their spraying certificates soon.

There is no Head Groundsman or an experienced groundsman for the two young lads to lean on as they have both left the club in the last twelve months. This has

left Callum and Aaron to tend to the pitches by themselves.

Callum explains; "It's hard with just the two of us, but we get on with it. We decide every morning between ourselves on the appropriate work for the day. This seems to work as the pitch is still in good condition."

Callum believes they are pretty clued up as the old head groundsman taught them quite a bit in the short space of time they worked with him. He also goes to work

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## What's in the shed

- Allett C34 Buffalo
- Honda rotary mowers x 4 with brushes attached
- Toro fairway mower
- Spray linemarker
- Fertiliser spreader



“We have had around twenty-five games so far this season, plus one training session. That’s a mixture of first team games, cup games, youth cup games and Liverpool ladies who also use the pitch.”

They have also just had two fireworks displays which caused some minor scarring and burns to the pitch, but they will recover in the next few weeks with a little care and intention.

The stadium pitch is a Fibresand construction that is over twenty years old, together with an old automated irrigation system. When it comes to maintenance of the pitch, the lads like to keep it simple, carrying out a regular programme of works.

“Coming into the winter months, we will double cut and mark out before a match. During the week, the pitch will be cut twice a week, rotary and divot after a game. We will also have a contractor come in and verti-drain the pitch once a month at a depth of 8 inches. In between this, the lights will go on as much as possible.”

“The club invested in four second-hand SGL MU360’s 600-watt rigs last season from Everton. They help keep grass cover under

the North stand and are utilised in hard-worn areas of the pitch. Unfortunately, we have been having trouble with one or two of the sockets so, at present, we can only get three rigs on at a time.”

To try and keep games on when the winter months set in, they have a set of frost covers to cover all the pitch.

Not only do Callum and Aaron have the Prenton Park pitch to tend to each day, they are also responsible for the upkeep of twelve rootzone and soil-based community pitches located next to the stadium, which they must cut using the fairway mower and mark out for games. The academy teams and college utilise these.

“It’s tough! Originally, there were only four pitches, but they recently took on another eight, adding to our workload,” comments Callum. It doesn’t look like they will have any extra help anytime soon either.

Callum is hopeful the club may invest in a new Desso pitch next season, to help cope with the heavy schedule. This has been talked about as the club have just signed a 3-year deal with Liverpool FC Ladies to play all their fixtures at Prenton Park. He would like the addition of a few SGL MU18 rigs as they are lighter and more mobile, making it easier for them to spot treat areas of the pitch, but obviously this comes down to what budgets are available. Machinery is another area he would like the club to invest in eventually as they would want to be more self-sufficient.

In the future, Callum tells me he would love to work for Liverpool FC as a groundsman at any one of their sites; he is a big Liverpool fan.

After what I have seen today from both Callum and Aaron, I can only commend the work they are doing and their commitment to the job. If they keep it up, I’m sure they will go far. Good luck in the future lads.



with the grounds team at Liverpool FC on a match day when he can and seeks advice and tips from their Head Groundsman Dave Roberts. “It’s nice to have someone willing to support you and who you can turn to, to ask questions.”

Karl Standley at Wembley Stadium also invited him to work a matchday, which has helped him with his learning process, and he will always be grateful for the opportunity.

The Prenton Park pitch has a heavy fixture list to contend with. I visited the ground on a Wednesday at the end of October. In that week, they had a game that evening, but also just had a game on Saturday and Tuesday night with more games to follow on the coming Saturday and Sunday.



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## Chester Football Club

# A bit of a Deva!

Chester Football Club are currently members of the Vanarama National League North, the sixth tier of English football. The club was founded in 2010 following the winding-up of Chester City. In its inaugural season, it competed in Division One North of the Northern Premier League, following a successful appeal to the Football Association against its initial placement in the North West Counties League.

After winning this division, it then won the Northern League Premier Division in 2011-12 and the Conference North in 2012-13. Lee Williams chats to Head Groundsman **Michael Barrow** about life at the Deva Stadium



 **NorthWest Powerhouse**  
SPECIAL FEATURE

**T**he Deva Stadium - also currently known as the Swansway Chester Stadium for sponsorship reasons - is the home of Chester FC. The name Deva comes from the original Roman name for the fort Deva Victrix, which became the city of Chester. The stadium has a capacity of 5,376 (4,170 seated). It sits on the border between England and Wales; the border running alongside the rear of the east (main) stand. The address of the ground is officially classed as England, due to the main entrance of the building being in England.

Tucked away at the back of a large retail park, I turn into the stadium car park, where Head Groundsman Michael Barrow is waiting to meet me. Once signed in, he takes me through the stand and onto the pitch via the players' tunnel. We only manage to have a brief look at the pitch as

the first team are setting up for a training session before they travel to Brackley FC that evening, so we head off to the groundsman's shed for a chat.

Michael is a life-long supporter of the club and has always had an interest in football groundsmanship. His career started out at the MBNA Business Park on the outskirts of the city, where he used to look after a small 3G artificial pitch, a full-size grass pitch and a running track. Chester FC had used the facilities in the past to train.

Mike explains, "I was approached at a Chester away game about applying for the job as Head Groundsman. The club decided to give me the job even though I was new to it. They could have given the job to someone else with more experience, but I'm grateful they chose me as I am a lifelong fan." He started his new role in December 2015, where his first game was against Torquay United.

"My partner was due with Isaac, so I had a divot fork in one hand and a phone in the other. Luckily, Isaac arrived the next day."

Mike gained his spraying certificates whilst studying for an NVQ in Landscape at Reaseheath College, and he now wants to start working towards an NVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf as soon as time allows.

Michael works on his own, looking after the stadium pitch on a day to day basis, but is grateful to the volunteers who help on match days, no matter what the weather. They also get a good response when they put a shout out on the website to help remove the eighteen frost covers.

"Last year, we got some freak weather that came out of the blue when we played Solihull in December. No snow was forecast. Then, the day of the game, I woke up and it was horrendous. Three of us attempted to move the snow off the pitch





**People have got to look back at pitches of the past and appreciate that they have improved dramatically**

until 11.00am, but it just kept coming down, so we put a shout out on the website. By one o'clock, there must have been fifty people, brushing, shovelling and generally getting stuck in and, by 2.30pm, it was all clear."

The pitch is a rootzone construction with a pop-up irrigation system with twelve sprinklers around the edge and six in the playing surface. Shade is a big problem under the west stand as it takes out a strip from the 18-yard line to the touchline all the

way down the pitch. "We suffer from the shade for twelve months of the year, even in summer after renovation; the seed struggles to germinate down that side."

When I walked on the pitch, I could still see the seed lines from the disc seeder. I asked Michael what renovation he carried out in the summer and, like many groundsmen around the country, how he had coped with the summer heat?

"It was very testing conditions with a very hot summer and a four-week window until we played Liverpool. We just went with the fraise mow this time, and disc seeded it with eighteen bags of seed four ways."

"The irrigation system was used as much as possible to give me a fighting chance to get the seed germinating, and I had to hand water some areas around the pitch where the sprinklers didn't seem to reach. But I managed to get the pitch ready in time for the Liverpool game."

Michael must adapt his maintenance regime around a busy schedule of games and training sessions each month. For example, in October, he had six games with the first team, youth team and an England Under 19s game, plus eight training sessions.

"Every morning I like to check the G860's blades are on cut. The height of cut is set at



Head Groundsman  
Michael Barrow

### What's in the shed

Dennis G860 with brush and scarifying cassettes  
Toro Reelmaster 2000D  
Honda rotary mower  
Old Kubota Tractor  
Fertiliser Spreader  
Linemarker  
Strimmer



28mm which helps give a bit of protection. I will then cut the pitch for a game or training session, then swap the unit around for the brush attachment and clean up any debris from the pitch.”

When possible, he likes to get the slitter and solid tiner on the pitch. Michael is about to sign a deal with a contractor to vert-drain the pitch five times a year. “The roots are currently at a depth of three inches, and I hope the verti-drain will improve on this in

the future,” he comments.

Soil tests have been taken from the pitch, and they came back with no significant deficiencies. Michael tells me he has no real budget when it comes to fertilising the pitch. “I haven’t got a set amount, I could go in the office and ask for a few hundred pounds but, depending on results and the income coming in, this can be a struggle. The club does try to support me the best they can though. When money is available, I have



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# Getting Personal

## Michael Barrow - his granddad, football, sunday lunch and biting his nails

**Who are you?** Michael Barrow, Head Groundsman, 30 years old.

**Family status.** Long term partner with a three-year-old son called Isaac.

**Who's your hero and why?** My granddad. He introduced me to Chester City FC and playing cricket.

**What would you change about yourself?** Have more confidence in myself.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** Cheshire chicken and ham pie.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** Getting the Head Groundsman job at Chester.

**What are your pet peeves?** Fast feet.

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

**What's the best part of your job?** Matchday preparation.

**... and the worst?** Divoting.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** Head Groundsman with Chester playing League Football.

**Favourite record, and why?** Anything from the Killers, been to many concerts.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** My partner.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Go on a long holiday.

**If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why?** Drums, I used be the drummer in the crowd when I was younger.



**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** George Best, Brandon Flowers and Sir Alex Ferguson.

**Do you have any bad habits?** Biting my nails. My partner point it out to me all the time lol.

**... or any good ones?** Precision.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** Yes, I am always thinking about what I'm up against tomorrow.

**What are you reading at the moment?** The Card, written by a supporter of the club.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Believe in yourself.

**What's your favourite smell?** Sunday lunch.

**What do you do in your spare time?** Spend time with my family.

**What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked?** When is the pitch going to start cutting up?

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

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Hard working, conscientious and honest.

**What talent would you like to have?** Professional footballer.

**What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?** No warm-ups in the goalmouths.



been using organic granular fertilisers with liquid seaweed and chelated iron products."

The club is doing well at present, lying sixth in the league and unbeaten at home at the time of writing. Michael has his fingers crossed that they can continue with this run of form all season and get themselves promoted, or at least be in the mix. This would help bring in extra revenue for next season. Ideally, he would like to koro off the pitch before next season, but this will all depend on the funds available at the time.

Michael believes more and

more pressure is being put on groundsman in the lower tiers of football, with fans watching top flight football on TV and expecting their teams' pitches to look the same.

"Fans have got to realise we don't have the funds available to provide a similar surface, but we do our best with what we have. We try and provide the best surface possible, day in day out. People have got to look back at pitches of the past and appreciate that they have improved dramatically since then; we have some great quality surfaces now in non-league football."



**It was very testing conditions with a very hot summer and a four-week window until we played Liverpool**



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## Curzon Ashton FC

# In the Nick of time!

Curzon Ashton Football Club is a semi-professional association football club based in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. Founded in 1963 and nicknamed “the Nash”, the club is affiliated to the Manchester Football Association and currently competes in the Vanarama National League North, the sixth tier of English Football

**T**he Timeside Stadium has been the home of Curzon Ashton Football Club since it was officially opened by Sir Alex Ferguson in 2005. The ground has two covered stands and is fully terraced on all four sides and it currently holds the FA ‘B’ Grading. Total capacity is 4,000, with 527 seated and 3673 standing.

For the first game at the new ground, Curzon played a Manchester United XI which included Gerard Piqué, Giuseppe Rossi, Frazier Campbell and Jonny Evans. Outside the stadium, a statue stands to commemorate three locally born footballers associated with the World Cup; Geoff Hurst (born in Ashton), Jimmy Armfield (Denton), and Simone Perrotta (also born in Ashton).

Outside the stadium, I met up with Nick Wild, whom I have known personally for over seven years. I have often wondered and admired how he manages to share his time between being a full-time Head Greenkeeper at Reddish Vale Golf Club, whilst providing a consistent quality surface that anybody would be proud of, in his part-time role as Head Groundsman at Curzon Ashton FC.

Nick has been at Curzon for nine seasons, and he used to play for them fifteen years ago until he went to work for a golf course down South; this is when he stopped playing football entirely at about twenty-nine years old.

After a few years, he moved back up North; at the same time Curzon had moved into their new stadium. Nick explains; “I had spoken to a few people who told me they were having problems with the pitch but didn’t really get involved.” After five years, Nick was contacted by the manager at the time whom he used to play for.

Nick had been doing some work for

Glossop North End FC, his local team who he played for prior to joining Curzon. “I did eighteen months at Glossop; we had some good success up there. It was an old cinder pitch so, basically, it just needed plenty of verti-draining to get that connection through, and decompacting, and it came good really quickly.”

At this time, Curzon had played Glossop quite a few times and had noticed improvements in the pitch from what it had once been. Twelve months down the line, Curzon contacted Nick, asking if he would look at their pitch, and he was more than happy to see what he could do to help a team he used to play for. He began by giving them advice on ways to improve the quality of the surface and it wasn’t long before he was asked if he would be their head groundsman, to which Nick agreed.

As previously mentioned, Nick is also full-time Head Greenkeeper at Reddish Vale Golf Club and must manage his time between both sites. This means a lot of hours spent at work, whether it be at Curzon or the golf club. “But the golf club always takes priority; that is my career,” Nick explains. “If we have problems at the golf club, Curzon gets put on the back burner, it’s as simple as that, Reddish has to come first. We do seem to have everything in order though. It’s rare that we can’t come to Curzon; we might be late or only have an hour on the pitch, but generally, we get it done.”

As Nick gets to make improvements with the general maintenance and drainage work to the pitch year on year, he is finding it increasingly difficult to meet the high standards he sets himself with the limited hours he and his team can put into it.

Nick can call on the help of Barry who has been with him eight years, whom he says is





 **NorthWest Powerhouse**  
SPECIAL FEATURE



SGL MU50 lighting rig



**We try and keep our standards as professional as possible; that's important to us. We are now renowned for having a really good pitch. Even though we are at non-league level, the pressure is on to keep the pitch as good as possible**

“knocking on a bit”. At this time, Barry was in the room which gave us all a laugh, but he is a great help to Nick when it comes to the little jobs. He also has his Deputy from the golf club, Justin Pickering, who works Monday-Friday which, in the summer, means they can both be at the ground for 2.00pm, which enables them to get around 3-4 hours work in. In the winter, they manage to get about 1-2 hours in with the nights drawing in, making maintaining the pitch more difficult.

Nick feels lucky that, when it comes to budgets and investment in the playing surface, the club has backed him from day one. He doesn't really have a budget. It's a matter of working to what they need at the time. The club trust that Nick will not go over the top and only spend what he feels he needs to, this gives him the freedom to get what he needs when he needs it.

The original construction of the Tameside Stadium pitch was poor. When Nick first went into the club there was very

little information available about pitch construction or specifications. This meant that at the end of the season he would have to carry out investigations himself, to get a better understanding of the make-up of the pitch and what he had to deal with.

“It was a case of getting a spade out and having a dig around to see what we were working with, as the water certainly was getting away. It appeared to be 12½ inches of poor soil - if you could class it as soil! Below that was a blinding layer of stone, but it reminded me of blue slate, and below that was what you would class as a membrane over broken brick; the membrane reminded me of being like an onion bag; that was the kind of quality.” Nick believes the stone above the membrane is just there to stop the soil going onto the membrane and blocking it up. After his initial assessment, it was decided that they would have to address the drainage issues going forward if they were to start getting the improvements they required to the surface.

Nick agreed a plan of drainage work to be carried out before the start of the coming season. “We decided to go with excavated sand slits, using a whizz wheel down to the membrane, just tickling into that stone, as we could cover more area with the money available at the time. The excavated sand slits are at one metre centres enabling us to cover more area initially, making it drain better to begin with, this tied the surface into the membrane.” If they were to put main drains in first, which would be the ideal scenario, they may have only got four or five in a year with the funds available.

Nick goes on to tell me that they did do it odd ways about though. He would have liked to put primary drains in first and then gone with the secondary. Since this initial work, the club have invested heavily in their drainage and now have main drains running lengthways down the pitch at four metre centres which are 150mm wide, with a 100mm perforated land drain in the bottom, 2-6mm gravel over the top and a 4-inch sand cap, running into a main drain behind the goal. They are now halfway



Hunter irrigation system



**I know of non-league lower level clubs that have had a grant, gone out and bought a tractor or a cutting machine, but don't know how to look after them**

through the project and will carry on at the end of the season.

With Nick and his team being part-time, I asked him how he manages to provide a quality surface that any football league club would be proud of with the limited time he has available for maintenance. I know from first-hand experience the difficulties we all face as groundsmen and the pressure we are under to deliver a quality surface day in day out, especially now we have social

media, and I was full time!

"We try and keep our standards as professional as possible; that's important to us. We are now renowned for having a really good pitch. Even though we are at non-league level, the pressure is on to keep the pitch as good as possible."

As well as Curzon playing on the pitch, the stadium also hosts Burnley Under 23s which helps bring money into the club. For the preparation of a game on a Saturday,

Nick will double cut on a Friday, and also likes to cut the pitch - and sometimes double cut if he can get Justin in on a match day! This means, on a Saturday, he must try and juggle work at the golf club. He will then mark out on the day of the game, emulating what most professional football clubs do.

Once the game has begun, he will tend to stay until after half-time, then goes home to spend some time with the family after a long week and get a few hours rest. No work is

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carried out immediately after the match; he will go in on Sunday after he has finished at the golf club and start to repair the pitch.

"I have a little ride-on brush that I have kind of manufactured. It's a lightweight thing out of a Sisis Robbi that used to be for our 3G. I tend to brush the pitch two ways to flick up anything that has come away. That is followed up with a rake cassette that goes in the Allett C34, and we pick it up with that." Most clubs use rotaries to clean up after games. Nick would invest in rotaries if he had more time but, for now, this method works for him.

As winter draws ever closer, Nick will have less time to carry out his maintenance. I asked him how he will get around this, "As we lose the light, we will then turn the floodlights on to get around if we are tidying up or cutting. To verti-drain, we have big lights fitted to the roll bar of the tractor front and back which puts down plenty of light. Then we just verti-drain in the dark till six o'clock. It's a matter of just working around the problems."



**Golf, as an industry, is in decline. Golfing members and numbers are still dropping off from ten years ago**



The pitch rarely suffers from disease as the ground is open, allowing plenty of airflow. There has been the odd occasion when they have had bits and pieces of fusarium kick off and a bit of leaf spot, but they have never sprayed a fungicide. "I don't feel there is a need to do it, and we don't suffer like somewhere that is a bit more enclosed, where it is damp all the time and it's difficult to dry out. In September, we will get bits and pieces when it's damp but, once we get a windy day, the pitch will dry out quickly; we are lucky in that respect."

Nick puts his own fertiliser programme together after he has received the results of his independent soil tests. He tends to use quite a lot of organics on the pitch and tops this off with the odd recovery spray.

When I first walked into the ground, the first thing I noticed was the SGL MU50 lighting rig standing proudly under the shaded area of the main stand. This was a shock to me as not many Football League clubs have lighting rigs, never mind a non-

league club, but I have got to say it was good to see. This, to me, shows the forward thinking of the club and that they are willing to invest in providing the best playing surface possible. Nick is very proud of the fact he has the rig at his disposal.

"I believe more clubs should be looking at investing in lighting rigs as they are more affordable than most people think; the benefits are huge. We mainly use ours under the main stand and occasionally in the goalmouths now we have the extra cable. It has enabled us to keep grass cover in areas where we have struggled in the past. It is my insurance policy when it comes to keeping grass. It's a brilliant tool."

Nick does not have frost covers at the club, as it's a significant investment, and one that he feels is not necessary at this moment, and he doesn't have the staff and time available to get them on and back off. If the club lose a game to the weather, it is, unfortunately, just one of those things.

When it comes to renovation, Nick believes it is essential for every club, if





**During my initial contact with the Chairman and CEO, I told them they have to do x, y and z and spend this and that kind of money per season but, if they were not willing to do that, we were not going to move forward**

possible, to spend the money and back the groundsman to do the relevant work that is required on the pitch, as this gives a good base for the rest of the season ahead. Again, Nick feels very fortunate that Curzon invest the money into the renovation works. This year was no different.

“Alongside carrying on with the drainage works, we koroed the top off and put on 120 tonnes of Chelford 45 sand. Then we verti-drained down to 6 inches and worked

the sand into the holes, which worked well as it was so dry. The main aim of this was to get some clean sand into the soil layer. The surface was then turned over with a Blec Power Rake to get the levels back; especially with all the drainage work, it helped to fill in any areas that had sunk. Finally, we overseeded it with Johnsons Premier Pitch grass seed and, a week later, applied a conventional fertiliser.”

With the renovation works and regular aeration they have carried out over the years, they have managed to improve the root depth slightly, but the construction of the pitch is still a problem. Nick tries to concentrate on the density of the roots rather than length, and this seems to work for him as he doesn't get many divots coming out of the pitch, just scarring.

### What's in the shed

- Toro 2000D triple mower
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**I believe more clubs should be looking at investing in lighting rigs as they are more affordable than most people think; the benefits are huge**

The club manages to fund the work on the pitch as, next to the ground, they have a full-size 3G pitch which is hired out throughout the week and at the weekends. Around 1,000 children a weekend play their league games with their parents watching, plus the first team, ladies' team and disabled team use it for training.

Extra revenue is brought in by having the bar open and, alongside this, they have a café selling hot/cold drinks, snacks and hot food. Then, at the end of the season, the East Manchester Junior football league have all their finals on the main pitch, which last about five weeks.

Nick still likes to keep up the high standards, even though the pitch is taking a battering as the children expect to play on the same quality pitch they have seen the first team play on all season. This gives Nick a tighter renovation window but, without it, he wouldn't have the funds to do the relevant work he requires.

Finally, I asked Nick what his thoughts on the industry are as he can answer from



both sides of the coin. "Golf, as an industry, is in decline. Golfing members and numbers are still dropping off from ten years ago. It's getting more and more difficult, you have got to ensure you are producing a product that people want to use, and that is where the pressure lies. It has got to be good all the time."

He recalls that, when he first started in greenkeeping, it was a summer game, with only some people playing in winter. Now it's non-stop. The golfers want the same quality greens throughout the whole year; the pressure of trying to produce that means improving the surfaces. "Greens are definitely improving; if you have dry firm greens in Manchester, you are doing alright."

When it comes to the football side of the industry, Nick believes that, at the top-level, investment is great but, as you come down into lower end football league and non-league clubs, they are struggling. "As I have said before, we are really fortunate with the support we get. Investment in the pitch is what makes it a success, alongside what me and my team have done with the pitch, but this would not have happened without that investment."

They have made the most of the grants that have been made available to them which has helped with the drainage works. Nick believes more investment needs to be made available for grassroots football and what the clubs do receive has to be spent wisely

and maintained.

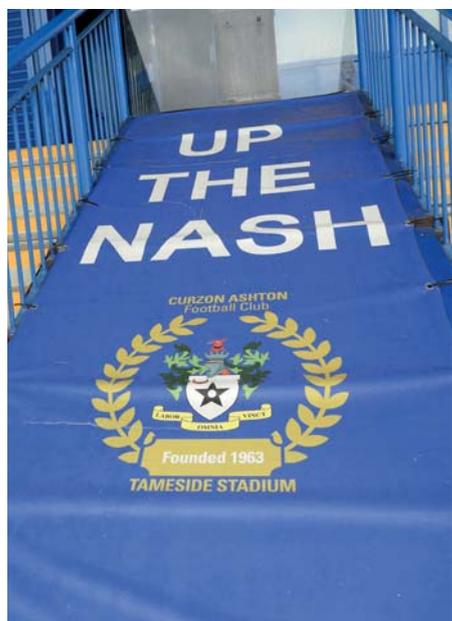
"I know of non-league lower level clubs that have had a grant, gone out and bought a tractor or a cutting machine, but don't know how to look after them. That investment is great but, if you end up with a mower that has not been maintained properly, then it's pointless. As a groundsman at non-league level, we should have to meet criteria and maybe go on courses that give you access to grants."

"Even I would do it, if it was required. Ideally, this would be a course that went through the maintenance of machinery, how you put it on cut, how you set the height of cut and daily checks etc. Then, once you complete the course and get your certificate, that opens the door for grants to be given."

"What's happening at the minute is that money is being invested, and there are grants out there for draining football pitches, for example, but then there's no real maintenance afterwards. Then clubs are going back after three years and saying the drains aren't working. The funding isn't too bad, but it could be better.

At this level and lower, it needs some kind of qualification gained and understanding to be able to use a tractor, verti-drain and things like that, combined with a general knowledge of turf.

This can only help everyone improve their skills going forward and help provide better surfaces around the country."



**It was a case of getting a spade out and having a dig around to see what we were working with as the water certainly was getting away**

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A man with short blonde hair and a beard is standing on a football pitch. He is wearing a black zip-up jacket with the Rochdale AFC crest on the left chest and the 'errea' logo on the right chest. The background shows a large stadium with tiered seating, advertising boards for 'www.reside.agency', 'RESIDE', 'ROCKDOOR', and 'webuyanycar.com', and a clear blue sky.

## Rochdale Association Football Club

# Dual battle

It's the middle of October 2018 and the sun is shining, which is rare for Rochdale at this time of year. The temperature is around thirteen degrees and Lee Williams, on his first assignment for Pitchcare, is at the Crown Oil Arena to meet up with **Niall Hazlehurst** who recently took up his first Head Groundsman position at Rochdale AFC

# NorthWest Powerhouse

## SPECIAL FEATURE

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**N**iall takes me for a quick look around the facilities and the pitch before we sit down for a brew and a chat about how he first got into the industry and what led him to take up the challenge at Rochdale.

Niall explains, "When I left school, I sent a letter out to all the north-west football clubs. Bolton Wanderers was the only one to get back to me and I started to do volunteer work for them on match days, which then led to an apprenticeship offer. Over the next eleven years, I worked my way up the ladder, which began at the academy and later transitioned to the first team training ground, until they merged into one. Then, roughly four years ago, I took over the running of the new training ground at Lostock which has one

fibresand pitch, three sand/soil ameliorated pitches, three soil pitches and a large 3G pitch."

In September 2018, Niall made his recent move to Rochdale's Crown Oil Arena as Head Groundsman. I asked him how he ended up here.

"A contractor was looking after the Spotland pitch over the summer and he found out from a mutual friend that I was looking to step up and make that next move in my career. They got in touch and asked if I would be interested in having a chat, so I met with Bill Goodwin - my boss and one of the club's director and, at the time, also acting CEO. We had an hour long conversation and, when we had sorted out the right package, it didn't take long for me to realise this was a great opportunity."

"I am starting with a blank canvas really,

**"**  
**I like to attend industry shows and seminars to try and find out what's going on, what's coming out and what's new. This also gives new and better ideas on how I can improve the pitches**



SGL MU50 lighting rigs



**The club has a realistic view of what they want to achieve**

**Club history**

Rochdale Association Football Club is a professional football club based in the town of Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The club currently competes in League 1, the third tier of the English Football League system.

Nicknamed “the Dale,” the club was founded in 1907, moved to its current stadium, Spotland stadium, in 1920 and was accepted into the Football League in 1921. Since then, the club has remained in the third and fourth tiers of English football.

The stadium is known locally as Spotland, but is currently called the Crown Oil Arena for sponsorship reasons. It has a capacity of 10,249.

The stadium was officially opened in 1920 and, for the first sixty-eight years of its existence, was used exclusively by Rochdale FC. Between 1988 and 2016, the ground was jointly owned by the football club, Rochdale Council and Rochdale Hornets, the rugby football league association. In 2016, Rochdale AFC bought the stadium shares they did not hold to own 100% of Spotland Stadium. At the same time, the stadium received its new sponsored name - The Crown Oil Arena - because of a sponsorship agreement between Rochdale AFC and its first stadium sponsor.

so I’m looking forward to making my mark and showcasing what I can do - that’s the aim of the game.”

“I didn’t really know anything about the industry when I started at Myerscough College. I was going to complete a sports course but, one day, I spotted the sportsturf qualification so thought I would give it a whirl to see if I could get into it. Once I started, I was hooked. I looked up to people like Paul Burgess at Real Madrid and Jonathan Calderwood at PSG and I thought I would love to be in their position one day.”

Niall’s current qualifications include NVQ Level 2 & 3 and spraying certificates PA1, 2 & 6.

In his new role, Niall will have full responsibility for the budgets for all the grounds maintenance. “This will involve sitting down with Bill and going through past budgets and working out a budget for fertilisers, machines and equipment which

will all be merged into one figure and down to me to manage.”

“This will cover the stadium, but we also have a minimal budget for the cricket ground where we look after two lacrosse pitches which have a basic irrigation system. We don’t see ourselves being here long term, so the club doesn’t want to spend a lot of money in those areas.”

The club has recently gone through a lot of changes with groundstaff. “At this moment in time, it’s just myself looking after everything, with the occasional help of part-time casual groundsman James Schofield. One person has just left and we are in the process of looking for an apprentice. I think I’ve found a new deputy head, providing salaries match up but, if not, we have some applications to look at and start the interview process.”

I asked if he had any help from contractors or agronomists, especially being short staffed at this present moment? “Yes,



Hunter irrigation system



Niall busy divoting



**I feel lucky that Rochdale are listening to what I say and are implementing changes from my suggestions, but I'm sure not all venues are the same**

we have a contractor who is helping us out whilst we are short."

Over the last eighteen months it has been well publicised that Rochdale has had some problems with the main pitch. I asked Niall if he thought these issues were now resolved and what the current structure of the pitch was.

"We have a big problem with shade from the main stand which means that, as soon as the growing season ends and

we enter into the dormant period, that side of the pitch doesn't see any sun until spring. Obviously, every club has the same problems but, with limited resources and limited grow lights, it's a real battle."

What's the pitch like when it comes to drainage, especially with the heavy downpours and prolonged spells of rain we had experienced lately?

"The pitch is currently draining really well. A few weeks ago, we had 45mm of

rain over two or three days but, within an hour of the rain stopping, it was fine. This was a huge relief to me given the history of the pitch. We have had problems in the past with aeration, so getting a programme together was the biggest key for this pitch."

I noticed two SGL MU50s lighting rigs were being utilised under the main stand in the shaded area, but was keen to find out if they were also used in the goalmouths and

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# Getting Personal

## Niall Hazlehurst - Formula 1 addict who likes a wind instrument

**Who are you?** Niall Hazlehurst, Head Groundsman, Rochdale AFC.

**Family status:** Married with a little boy.

**Who's your hero and why?** Lewis Hamilton. I love Formula 1.

**What would you change about yourself?** To try and switch off from work.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** Stella Artois.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** Becoming Head Groundsman at Rochdale AFC.

**What are your pet peeves?** People cutting across the pitch.

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

**What's the best part of your job?** Saturday afternoon when everything is set up for game.

**... and the worst?** Diving.

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** To be a Premier League Head Groundsman.

**Favourite record, and why?** Wonder Wall, Oasis.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** Cameron Diaz.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Buy a Ferrari or Lamborghini.

**If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why?** A trumpet as I never stop farting lol.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** David Beckham, Gazza and Vinny Jones.



**If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why?** I would love to live a day in Donald Trump's shoes.

**Do you have any bad habits?** Snoring.

**... or any good ones?** No.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** Yes.

**What are you reading at the moment?** Pitchcare.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Keep it simple.

**What's your favourite smell?** Freshly cut grass.

**What do you do in your spare time?** Chase my little lad around.

**What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked?** How do you get the different colour greens in the grass?

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** Pedestrian sprayer, as it's just been delivered.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Sociable, hard-working and honest.

**What talent would you like to have?** Professional footballer.

**What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?** A law so groundsman dictate where all warm-ups take place, and that the rules are actually adhered to.



warm up areas, and if Niall felt they will give him an advantage in keeping some grass cover going into the winter?

"Those lighting rigs are a godsend and, as soon as a game finishes, we place them in the goalmouths. We do currently have them situated under the main stand as we are trying to work them up and down the wing to help give the surface the best chance through the winter."

"We are also looking at getting two smaller ones as I feel the more we have, the better. but it's just having the budget to make the purchase."

Rochdale (as with most places in the north) can see some

heavy frost and snow in winter and I asked Niall what provisions he had in place to cope with these conditions; for example, undersoil heating, or does he have to work with frost covers?

"We have no undersoil heating, but we do have Stuart Canvas frost covers on inflatable rollers. I'm yet to see a winter here in Rochdale so I will have to see how it goes ... fingers crossed, the winter will be good to me."

As well as football being played on the pitch, Niall also has to deal with the stresses of having Rochdale Hornets Rugby League Football Club using the Spotland pitch. The





**What I inherited is getting old or in a state of disrepair, but I fully appreciate that things take time, and I can't expect the club to go out and get everything I require straight away**

the end of the growing season though.”

“If we have football on Saturday and rugby on Sunday, we will just tidy up the pitch after the game and choose not to cut so, by the game on Sunday, the height is at around 28mm.”

“Since I started here, we have given it a weekly tidy up with the verti-cut cassette on the Dennis G860. We only have one unit, so it takes a little bit longer but does a great job. We also use that machine to cut the pitch on a regular basis.”

Walking into the groundsman's shed with Niall, I notice he has a stock of fertiliser in the corner. This prompted me to delve a bit deeper into whether he has a fertiliser programme in place for the pitch, what are the main diseases that affect the pitch, and does he like to use a preventative programme when it comes to disease, rather than be reactive?

“Leaf spot has been the big one since I came in. We suffered really badly with it in the middle to end of September, but now it's been treated, it seems to be at bay with no visible signs. I used Instrata Turf Disease Control and followed that up with Instrata Elite a few days later just to make sure it was all wiped out and give it a clean bill of health. Going forward, we will have a disease programme in place which will be added to our fertiliser programme.”

I asked Niall about his fertilising regime in the coming months and does he have a set number of NPK he is looking at for the rest of the season?

“We have had soil samples taken from the pitch, and we have drawn up a programme from those results. The tests came back with deficient levels of magnesium, but everything else was fine, to a certain extent. We put down a 3-month slow release

rugby league season has just ended so, for now, his main concern will be getting the pitch through winter. Niall explained his maintenance regime to achieve this.

“Through summer, the height of cut was at 28mm. As soon as I started, my first thought was that it was a bit too long, so we went down to 25mm. I will lift it to 26mm at

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## What's in the shed

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 Lawnflite hi-speed rotaries x 3  
 Spray marker  
 Techneat pedestrian sprayer - 120L  
 Fertiliser spreader  
 New Holland tractor  
 Charterhouse verti-drain



15:0:28 at 35g/m<sup>2</sup> two weeks ago to keep it ticking over, followed by ProTurf 12:5:20 at 35g/m<sup>2</sup> two weeks later.”

“We have recently purchased a Techneat pedestrian sprayer, so it will be easier to incorporate growth stimulants to try and help harden up the plant as much as we can given how wet it gets in Rochdale.”

“To help boost the magnesium levels and try and improve the colour, we have applied ICL STEP Hi-Mag at a rate of 11gm/m<sup>2</sup> and I feel this has really improved the colour. Going into the new year, we will be using Greenmaster Pro-Lites (invigorator/ Double K) to give it that kick and wake it up after Christmas.”

Niall is looking for the club to invest in some new machinery. “What I inherited is getting old or is in a state of disrepair, but I fully appreciate that things take time, and I can't expect the club to go out and get everything I require straight away. They are listening to me and my requirements, and they accept that this will need some investment in the near future.”

The purchase of the sprayer was an immediate request so that Niall could spray the pitch himself rather than rely on a contractor. This gives him much more control when it comes to timing. He has also presented the club with new machinery proposals which include a new tractor, a Toro ProCore and a Toro Reelmaster.

With Niall having the new challenges of dual code sports, I was interested to know his plans for next year when it comes to the renovation of the surface.

“We will get a six-week window to carry out all renovations when the rugby team will play elsewhere. With the carpet surface, it's about getting as much vegetation out, which will be achieved using the specially adapted rotary head on the Koro Field Top Maker. The contractor we used last summer has a much better understanding of the surface now and what will work. It will be a matter of seeing how clean we can get it, which will then determine how much sand it will require and the rate we seed at. We currently use



**One day, I spotted the sportsturf qualification so thought I would give it a whirl to see if I could get into it**





**The pitch is currently draining really well. A few weeks ago, we had 45mm of rain over two or three days but, within an hour of the rain stopping, it was fine**

Johnsons Premier Pitch, but we are not averse to changing this nearer the time to whatever is best suited."

With the subject of dual-use on the pitch in mind, I went on to ask Niall, how he prepares for a doubleheader of football and rugby. "I experienced this on my second weekend here, when we were still in the growing season. We double cut on Thursday and Friday and cut once on Saturday morning which, looking back, we probably shouldn't have done considering the length required for the rugby, but we marked up for football."

"When the football finished, we went straight out with the Dennis machines using the brush cassettes to tidy up the debris as this is quicker than the rotaries and does an effective job. We greened out the football lines, marked in the rugby lines and swapped the posts over. Then, on Sunday morning, we came in around 9.00am, put the pads on the posts, put the corner flags out and marked the dashes in. On Monday morning, we used the dragbrush to stand the sward back up, gave it a clean-up with the Lawnflite rotaries and, the rest of the week, we knocked the divots back. Then it was just a matter of letting the pitch recover

without putting too much stress on it."

The club currently has two training bases; the local cricket club (as previously mentioned) where there are two pitches, and they also train on a fibresand pitch at the University of Manchester's Platt Lane site, which was formerly Manchester City's Academy. The club is looking to invest in their own bespoke facility, which will enable the first team and youth team to train on one site, which can only mean exciting times for Niall and the club in the near future.

"Involvement in this project is what helped attract me to move to Rochdale and take on a new challenge. The club has a realistic view of what they want to achieve, and it will be great to be a part of that. It will also be so nice to have a training ground we can call our own."

Since taking the step up, Niall has leaned on the advice of people around him who he trusts in the industry. He gave a special mention to Chris Simm, Head Groundsman at Bolton Wanderers who was his old boss and taught him a lot during his time there. Niall also seeks advice from a former head groundsman who knows the pitch like the back of his

hand from his past work there. At the same time, he has his own way of doing things but, as he says "it's always good to get a different opinion".

Niall believes our industry is in a healthy place at present and feels it's good to see some young faces picking up some key positions. However, he strongly feels groundsman and greenkeepers are being undervalued, under-rated and are not being listened to.

"I feel lucky that Rochdale are listening to what I say and are implementing changes from my suggestions, but I'm not sure all venues are the same. I like to attend industry shows and seminars to try and find out what's going on, what's coming out and what's new. This also gives new and better ideas on how I can improve the pitches and allows me to network with other groundsman and meet new people to share thoughts."

At this point, my brew had got cold as we had been too busy talking. I took this as my cue to leave.



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## Culcheth Sports Club

# An atomic fusion

Culcheth Sports Club, near Warrington in Cheshire, provides a wide range of sporting and social activities for the local community. A former Department of Atomic Energy sports club, it is now a not for profit facility. Lee Williams met up with their groundsman **Ian Trantum** to find out how he manages the four acre multi-sports site



**O**n May 29th 1998, the present club site and buildings were purchased outright from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) for £203,000. This purchase was only possible due to sponsorship provided by the Sports Council, using National Lottery finance. The sponsorship funding amounted to about two-thirds of the cost, whilst the remainder, some £65,000, was obtained from club reserves and loan facilities.

Although there are 'claw-back' clauses in the contract to prevent the members from selling out at a profit, the club now belongs to its members. Unlike their predecessor - the DATEN Sports and Social Club -

Culcheth Sports Club has no membership restrictions of any kind. The club is now open to all.

For forty years, the DATEN Club (Department of Atomic Energy) operated under a licence agreement with the UKAEA and was, in operational terms, self-financing. A very favourable renting agreement with UKAEA, who also accepted responsibility for the rates, building insurance and maintenance did, however, represent a significant subsidy to the club. Latterly, BNF plc (British Nuclear Fuels) shared these support costs and provided grants for specific projects. The DATEN Club was responsible for the maintenance and decoration of the inside of the building and





### Culcheth Sports Club's history

It all began in 1946, when the Ministry of Supply formed its Division of Atomic Energy which located its Industrial Group Headquarters at Risley in some existing ordnance factory buildings. The task of this group was to harness, for peaceful purposes and specifically for the generation of electricity, the unlimited power source provided by nuclear fission. Civil servants were transferred from Ministry of Supply, Ministry of Works and other Government departments to meet the needs of this fast growing project, and these staff were soon augmented by further recruitment.

This was at a time when there was a great shortage of housing. The main living accommodation for these staff and their families was in the Culcheth locality in temporary war time huts, and in early post war single storey pre-fabricated homes in Culcheth. The present Taylor Industrial Estate and new housing occupy all these sites nowadays.

There was little by way of local recreational facilities in the area, but fortunately one of the sites had inherited tennis courts, a large recreational hall with a cinema and a stage, and ample space for badminton, dances, etc. In addition there was a bar and the Little Theatre for plays and smaller functions.

Football fields in the area were soon provided by a grant from the Civil Service Sports Council (CSSC) to whom all the 'atomics', as they were called by the locals, contributed by payroll deduction. The DATEN Sports & Social Club, which at that time catered solely for the Division of Atomic Energy staff, was soon formed and fully operational by the summer of 1947.

Part of the disused naval establishment, HMS Ariel West was acquired by the UKAEA after a meeting on 8 October 1956, with a grant of £15,000 from the Central Recreation Committee (successor to the CSSC). This site had a recreational building which is now the core unit of the present club. During, and for a short time after the war, HMS Ariel West was a naval camp, and the present Main Hall of the club was a gymnasium as well as being used for social functions and dances.

The Ariel Lounge in the club provides a reminder of these war-time connections and the coat of arms of HMS Ariel is on display there.



for the sports facilities outside. Prudent management over the years enabled the bar lounge and the bars themselves to be more than doubled in size, plus a large annexe, stores and groundsman's facility to be built onto the hall, and the provision of another smaller lounge, table tennis room, billiard room and a games room. Tennis courts were enlarged and resurfaced, and a cricket pavilion erected. The cost of all this extensive building and modernisation was met out of the club's income.

Culcheth Sports Club operates as a wholly independent and self-financing body, which must meet the challenges and demands of the future entirely from its own resources. Provision of high-quality sporting and leisure facilities at a competitive charge is a demanding task for any members' club, and requires both the support of and the active and effective participation in club activities by the membership at all levels.

Culcheth Sports Club nestles amid residential housing. As I park up just outside the gate of the groundsman's shed, Ian

Trantum, the club's groundsman spots me. jumps off his tractor and makes his way over the pitches to meet me. He takes me for a tour of the site, which includes two soil-based grass pitches, two bowling greens and four artificial tennis courts which he tends to by himself, whilst also looking after the perimeter of the site and doing some maintenance work in the building. We then go inside the building to the bar area, out of the cold for a brew and a chat.

Ian has worked as groundsman for the club for thirty-three years, joining in 1985. He found his way into the industry from school. Ian explains; "I first started for the council, working at Walton Hall Golf Club, through what was called job creation in those days. I then moved onto Manchester Golf Club but, after time, I felt I wanted a job closer to home to save on travel costs. This led me to apply for the job here, and I have never looked back."

He attended Reaseheath College where he studied for a diploma in greenkeeping, and he tells me there was no such thing as





**The tennis courts have just been renovated through a grant from the LTA for around £10,000. A specialist contractor was brought in, who removed most of the existing sand, cleaned the surface and re-topdressed with fresh sand**

NVQs when he was doing his qualifications. During his time at Reaseheath, he was inspired to further his career by Dennis Mottram and Jeff Braten, his tutors at the time.

Ian mainly works by himself, but with the occasional volunteer helping him with the odd task at the weekend.

He relies mostly on the help of Richard Roberts, Head Greenkeeper at Hartcommon Golf Club. "Richard is always on the other end of the phone to offer me advice, which I

appreciate. He also carries out the renovation of the pitches, bowling greens and verti-drains the pitches once a year for us."

The pitches are soil based, with additional drains put in when the club have had the funds to do so, but they mainly run off the old field drains. The pitches are used heavily over the year Ian explains, "We have a mix of Dagen FC and Culcheth FC under 13s, 15s, 18s, 21s, Thirds, Seconds, First Team and Veterans playing and training on the pitches,

plus we will rent them out if they are free. We also had Chester F.C train here in the summer."

The site covers an area over four acres which is split up between two football pitches, croquet, four all-weather tennis courts and two bowling greens.

"The tennis courts have just been renovated through a grant from the LTA for around £10,000. A specialist contractor was brought in, who removed most of the existing sand, cleaned the surface and re-

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# Getting Personal

## Ian Trantum - he'd like to sing Gentle On My Mind no doubt!

**Who are you?** Ian Trantum, groundsman at Culcheth Sports Club.

**Family status?** Married with one son.

**Who's your hero and why?**

Jonathan Thirsten; I love Rugby League.

**What would you change about yourself?** Go back and do better in school.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** A good meat and potato pie.

**What's been the highlight of your career so far?** Being nominated for groundsman of the year.

**What are your pet peeves?** People mithering me.

**If you could go anywhere right now, where would it be?** Bora Bora, Mexico.

**What's the best part of your job?** Working outside.

**... and the worst?** Winter

**Do you have a lifetime ambition?** To live a long healthy life.

**Favourite record, and why?** Anything Northern Soul.

**Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with?** The wife.

**If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do?** Look after friends and family.

**If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why?** Saxophone - chilled and mellow.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** Steven Fry, Jonathan Thirsten and Dean Martin.

**If you could be anyone for a day, who would it be and why?** Dean Martin.

**Do you have any bad habits?** Smoking.

**... or any good ones?** I like to help people as much as I can.

**Do you go to bed worrying about the next day's workload?** Sometimes.

**What are you reading at the moment? - Hard copy or online?** Pitchcare Magazine.

**What's the best advice you have ever been given?** Listen and learn.

**What's your favourite smell?** Fresh cut grass.

**What do you do in your spare time?** Walk the dog, read and watch TV.

**What's your favourite piece of kit?** SISIS Quadraplay.

**What three words would you use to describe yourself?** Understanding, helpful and a bit moody.

**What talent would you like to have?** To be able to sing.



topdressed with fresh sand.”

Maintenance of the pitches is kept simple with Ian using a Trimax Striker 150 tractor mounted rotary when possible. Cutting heights in summer is at 25mm, but is raised to 28mm in the winter to try and keep grass cover.

“In-between, I like to get as much aeration work done on the pitches as possible. I use the deep spiker every week on the SISIS Quadraplay, but this was difficult in the summer conditions this year. It took until now (end of October) for the ground to soften up to get Richard to Earthquake them for us, at a depth of 6-8 inches.”

Ian marks out both pitches once a week using a spray marker with mixable paint. Renovations taken out on the pitches this year consisted of deep scarification, an overseed with 100% perennial ryegrass mixture and a pre-seed fertiliser. He would have liked to topdress with 60 tonnes of sand, but

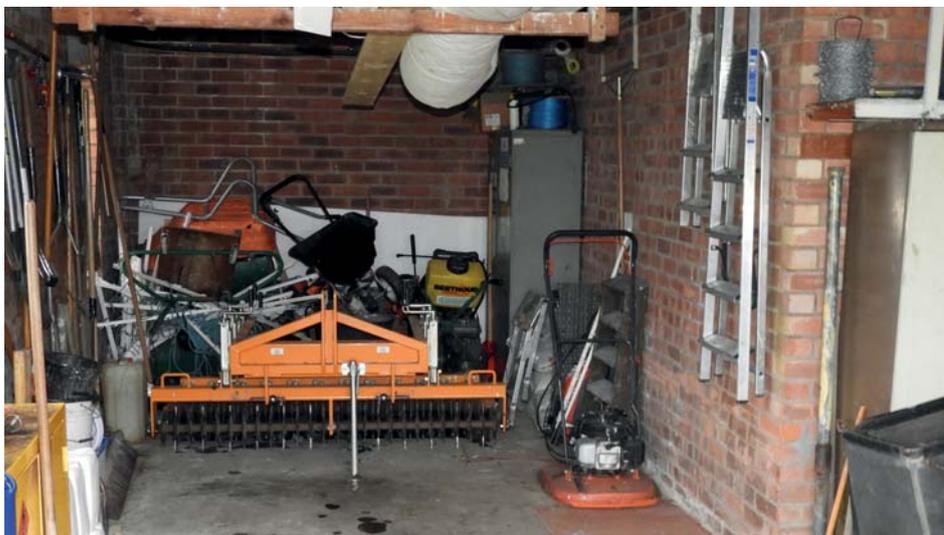
funds would not stretch that far this season.

“The dry summer hit us hard. It took the pitches and the bowling greens a long time to recover, especially having no irrigation system to speak of. The greens are still suffering now. We didn't carry out much work on them over the summer so as not to stress them out any further. We have only just managed to scarify two ways, overseed, micro hollow tine and fertilise them two weeks ago (end of October); fingers crossed, the weather is on our side and they start to germinate soon.”

Ian has a Replay machine - a brush with a little rake on it - which mounts onto the tractor. He uses this to tidy up the tennis courts every two weeks in summer and once a month in winter.

When it comes to budgets for machinery, renovation and fertiliser, the club tries to support Ian the best they can with what money they have available. “If I





#### What's in the shed?

Sisis Quadraplay  
 New Holland Boomer 25  
 Trimax Striker 150 tractor mounted rotary  
 Spray Marker  
 Fertiliser Spreader  
 Dennis FT610 cylinder mower  
 Chain Harrows  
 Strimmer

go in and say I need something for a machine I tend to get it straightaway if they have the money. The machines come first and always get a regular service once a year. If I need anything else, like fertiliser, this will all be down to available funds."

The club owns all their machines and will always look to buy secondhand to keep their costs down. "Recently, we looked at buying a Shockwave from Campey's, but we will have to wait and see!"

"Our football chairman is always looking to see what grants are available to help

improve the playing facilities or the clubhouse. He recently managed to get us a grant to refurbish all our dressing rooms."

The club is a non-profit making organisation and they put all the money brought in from the use of the club facilities back into maintaining and improving the site.

Looking to the future, Ian hopes to do a more extensive renovation on the football pitches in 2019, providing we don't get the prolonged hot summer we had last year. "There's nothing worse than your pitches looking garbage," he laments. He also hopes

for a kind winter, so his bowling greens have time to pick up.

Ian tells me he has been too long in the tooth now to go on training courses, but likes to read magazines to keep updated with what's new in the industry, "I like to read your magazine (Pitchcare), and I'm happy you have asked me to appear in it."

He also follows companies and industry professionals on Twitter and Facebook to keep up to date.



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Coventry Rugby Club

No ifs or  
Butts...

Head Groundsman, chief cook and bottlewasher... almost! Eric Richardson



After an interlude at nearby Coundon Road, Coventry RUFC returned to Butts Road Stadium in 2003, back to where it was founded in 1874. Now plans are in the offing that could transform the stadium to a state of the art sporting and conference venue, complete with an artificial grass pitch. Jane Carley meets Head Groundsman **Eric Richardson** to discuss developments



Plans for Butts Road Stadium in Coventry include a new artificial grass pitch and multi-purpose grandstand and conference facility

**B**utts Road has a chequered history - whilst Coventry Rugby was based a few streets away, the stadium had been transformed into an athletics track for Coventry Godiva Harriers and a velodrome, with a small area of grass at the centre. In dry weather, the shape of the old athletics track becomes visible in the turf and, during the hot summer, was eerily outlined in white grass, Head Groundsman Eric Richardson recalls.

“When the stadium was purchased by Ken Fairbrother in 2003, Northampton Saints Head Groundsman Piggy Powell was called into re-lay the pitch, albeit with limited resources.”

These days, the stadium is also home to Coventry Bears Rugby League Club and

Coventry United Football Club, as well as hosting a number of pop concerts, which inevitably takes its toll on the pitch.

Concerts attract up to 5,000 people, with the resulting damage from foot traffic, whilst the grass below the stage quickly goes yellow.

“We also have training on the pitch up to three times a week, so it gets a lot of wear. It’s gone into this season on the back of the wettest winter for a long time and the driest summer in history, and we have no irrigation, so I had to get a local farmer to come in with a bowser to water the pitch.”

There is little in the way of equipment for maintenance - just a slitter, triplex cylinder mower and linemarker, plus a few hand tools, so Eric relies on local contractor Lakeside Landscapers to verti-drain,

overseed and topdress the pitch.

Waterlogging that affected the pitch over the years has been tackled by sanding and Eric slits the surface every other day in winter, which has addressed aeration and drainage.

However, he admits that the heavy use can still quickly turn it into a quagmire in adverse conditions.

“We want the pitch to look as good as possible for our supporters, as well as for broadcasts on Sky TV - I stripe up the pitch with a Quadraplay, and it holds up well in bad weather to start with but, after the match, we need to keep off it and give the turf a chance to recover, which isn’t always possible.”

Wear is dictated by the different sports - football linesmen tend to run up and down



**It's been estimated that the new pitch would need 4-17 hours maintenance a week, and we will have to invest in suitable equipment, plus a facility to store and service it**

one side, whilst rugby touch judges step in and out. Eric also needs to re-mark between a rugby match on a Saturday, and football on a Sunday.

"I try not to green out too much as it can make the turf go black, and just let the lines fade out," he comments.

An artificial grass pitch (AGP) would revolutionise the way the playing surface is managed, and Eric is working with Strategic Development Consultant Nick Johnston to select a suitable system and supplier, whilst he also plans to undertake training on the ongoing management of this type of pitch.

"It's been estimated that the new pitch would need 4-17 hours maintenance a week, and we will have to invest in suitable equipment, plus a facility to store and service it."

He says that the main benefit would be to offer a surface that is consistent 365 days of the year, but points out: "It's wrong to assume that AGPs don't need maintenance or are not affected by frost. However, you don't get the 'spiking' that leads to ruts on turf and gets a game called off. We could



Used for training as well as fixtures for rugby league, rugby union and football, the pitch gets heavy wear

also use frost covers, but it needs consideration of where to roll them to, and the labour involved for laying and removing."

Artificial grass surfaces are increasingly accepted in rugby but, whilst Coventry United FC can play on artificial pitches as a Midland League team, it would rule out use of the Stadium for League One side Coventry City, who are considering options away from their current home at the Ricoh.

"Even with a natural turf surface there are compromises when sharing a stadium as cut heights of 35-50cm are preferred for rugby and 25mm for football; I also steer away from rolling the pitch to avoid compaction," Eric comments.

New floodlighting will be needed to take account of impending legislation banning electrical appliances containing mercury, and this will also form part of the consultation, but Eric comments that LED bulbs definitely have their compensations.

"Lights have to be tested to ensure they are producing the right LUX for TV cameras, and if one of those goes down it's not only the expense but the inconvenience of

getting a cherry picker to change a bulb 36 metres up. LEDs are designed to last a lifetime and require no maintenance so will make life easier."

The 12-14 week installation process for an AGP could be extended by unknowns below the surface, especially as Coventry was a bomb alley in the second world war.

"We will have to look at how it will affect the rugby league and football fixtures," Eric comments.

Easing the maintenance workload will certainly make a difference to Eric, who works on his own, with the services of six volunteers, three each for set up and clear up days before and after the weekend.

"I'm not just the groundsman, I'm also the cook and the maintenance man, so I can be feeding 200 people for an event as well as working on the pitch," he explains.

Away from the pitch development, plans include extending the grandstand and changing facilities and the construction of brand new stand on the west side of the pitch, and Eric comments that enhancing the commercial value of the stadium is key.



The outline of the former athletics track can still just be seen, and was revealed in white grass at the height of summer



The view from the existing stand



New structures could surround the stadium, which currently has only one main grandstand backed up by basic hospitality facilities around the pitch

**Timeline**

- 1874: Coventry Rugby established when members of Stoke Cricket Club played Allesley Park
- 1880: the ground at Old Bull Fields is enclosed and becomes known as The Butts
- 1899: W Judkins becomes the club's first British Lion
- 1918: club moves to Binley Road
- 1921: headquarters established at Coundon Road
- 2003: Ken Fairbrother purchases Coventry Rugby
- 2004: Butts Park Arena plays its first game since the return from Coundon Road
- 2006: Former player Andrew Green purchases the club
- 2009: Coventry Rugby threatened with liquidation, but the RFU provided a bond to allow it to go into administration, with the proviso that the club raised £50,000
- 2009: relegated to National League 1
- 2017: return to RFU Championship
- 2017/2018 season 7th place in Championship

“We have the largest number of supporters in the national league, but many clubs at our level are totally reliant on volunteers, which is not sustainable. You need to have structures in place and to develop other income streams.”

Butts Road is well placed to take advantage of the growth of the city, which Eric says is mainly due to the influx of students to Coventry and nearby Warwick Universities.

“We promote the club to the universities by offering students spectator and training packages, and we host varsity matches.”

“However, we’ve also got a big community around us and excellent transport links with ample parking and close proximity to the railway station, so there is lots of potential to do more with the club and, with an AGP in place, wear and tear is not going to be an issue.”



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## Doncaster Knights

# King of the Castle

Doncaster Rugby Football Club is a rugby union club representing the town of Doncaster. The first XV are known as the “Doncaster Knights”, and play in the RFU Championship. Being the most promoted side in English history has led to massive changes at the Castle Park ground and within the team structure. **Lee Blagden** explains all to Lee Williams

Castle Park Conference and Function centre is a multimillion-pound development and is one of the region's top conference venues, whilst remaining a supportive place for amateur rugby in the borough. The club motto - “rugby for all” - sees amateur side Doncaster Phoenix compete at the same ground, as well as the ladies side, Doncaster Demons.

Castle Park is the home of the Doncaster Knights Rugby Union side. Historically, the ground was known as Armthorpe Road, but was renamed in 2000. Capacity is around 5,000. In 2008, the club opened the £3m all-seater De Mulder-Lloyd Stand with a capacity of 1,650.

It's the beginning of November, on a dull, windy, overcast day. I'm at Castle Park to meet up with Lee Blagden, the Head Groundsman who greets me with a warm welcome just outside his office situated in the De Mulder-Lloyd Stand. Before we sit down and chew the fat, Lee takes me for a walk around the pretty impressive and extensive site for a Championship rugby union club who have made their way up the ranks. You can see their ambition is to be plying their trade in the Premiership soon.

Lee's journey to becoming Head Groundsman at Doncaster Knights first started whilst working in a glass factory. “I'd had enough of working all the time indoors. I then worked at Doncaster Rugby League for a while doing kit and stuff. I got a bit bored



with that and ended up asking a mate at the time if he knew of any jobs in rugby as I didn't want to leave the sport, and that's how I ended up with the assistant groundsman job here ten years ago."

Lee took the position of Head Groundsman eighteen months ago at the beginning of last season. At the same time, the club were putting a new stadium pitch in. Lee has no official qualifications but has gained certificates from various courses he has attended in the past. "I have learned to be hands on, asking questions of friends in the industry such as Andy Thompson, Head Groundsman at Sheffield Wednesday FC, who is always on the phone for me, and the ex-head groundsman from here, Pete Needham, who is now head groundsman at

Doncaster Rovers; they are both a great help."

Lee's current staff consists of Jake Marshall, 20 years old, who has been with the club as a full-time assistant groundsman for eight months; Andrew Huxley, 64 years old, who is a full-time gardener/groundsman, and Neil Poole, 39 years old, who is a full-time kitman/groundsman.

The facility consists of the new Eclipse Hybrid stadium pitch that was installed eighteen months ago, replacing the old rootzone pitch. Lee explains, "With the old pitch being unstable, we had many divots coming up, especially around scrums, which could cause injury to the players. So, the chairman and president decided to invest in a new pitch. A full new drainage system was

installed and a fully automated Rain Bird irrigation system consisting of twenty Rain Bird Eagle 950s on the outer and fifteen Rainbird 8005s in the centre."

Whilst on the subject, I ask Lee does he have to use any special methods when maintaining the Hybrid pitch on a day to day basis? "Not really; it is just like most other hybrid pitches. After a game, you need to give it a good clean up, rake it regularly and divot it. The main difference with this pitch, I have noticed, is that we have been putting on a lot more fertiliser. It's gone from a two-weekly application to seven to ten days; the drainage is that good, it's just leeching through the pitch."

The pitch does not have undersoil heating, but they do have frost covers. Lee



**We have the pitch Pro-Cored once a month at a depth of five inches, and verti-drained to eight inches three times a season**



tells me he would love the club to invest in lighting rigs. "I have looked at the rigs, but at present, they are out of our price range, but this may change in the future with the planned expansion of the stadium."

Alongside the stadium are four full-size sand/clay-based rugby pitches, a new SiS Rugby 60 3G pitch, which was installed ten weeks ago, and four mini juniors' pitches, again sand/clay based. They are also looking to expand the site in the future and build two more full-size rugby pitches.

Lee talks me through the renovation and maintenance regime on the Eclipse Hybrid pitch. "The top gets taken off using a special machine, getting as much grass out of the mat as possible. It's then verti-drained at a depth of eight inches, 150 tonnes of medium sand spread evenly over the surface and brushed in. It's then overseeded with thirty bags of grass seed - a mixture of Perennial and RPR ryegrass cultivars - and a pre-seed fertiliser applied at 35gm<sup>2</sup>."

Lee uses the Dennis G860s to cut the pitch on a regular basis at the height of

35mm, twice a day in the summer and, as winter approaches, they will cut when required. As I write, however, they were cutting at three times a week [early November].

He uses an outside contractor to carry out his aeration programme. "We have the pitch Pro-Cored once a month at a depth of five inches, and verti-drained to eight inches three times a season. We do this to relieve compaction, but also to help get our roots down. The last sample I took they were down to seven inches, which I was more than happy with being a sand based construction." He will use the Browns rake to tickle through the surface to help remove any dead grass and debris once a month, then will clean up with the Allett RM34 rotary mowers.

Lee likes to take soil samples from the pitch every six months, which is undertaken by his local sales rep. He will then have a fertiliser programme drawn up from the results and try and keep to it but, with many factors to consider, this can be changed.



**We use mainly liquids as, with the players going on the pitch training every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, getting granular on is difficult**





**We are lucky to have Farmstar, who sponsor the club. They have just provided us with a new Kubota B2261 tractor and also lend us machinery when required**

“The problem with this pitch is the leaching of nutrients going straight through the pitch, especially with heavy rain. We seem to be using a considerable amount of fertiliser this year, I have been using a three month plus polymer coated slow release product, but it is lasting half that time.”

“We use mainly liquids as, with the players going on the pitch training every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, getting granular on is difficult. I use chelated iron at twenty litres

an application, and various liquid feeds with added trace elements and a lot of seaweed. I will also apply a fungicide three to four times a year to prevent any disease coming in. The ground is open, and we have no problems with shade and good airflow, but I like to be safe rather than sorry when it comes to disease management.”

The surrounding rugby pitches are treated with a polymer coated slow release product applied three times a year at 35gm<sup>2</sup> and

topped up with liquid feeds when possible, as the pitches are used heavily throughout the season.

The club like to purchase their grounds machinery outright and have the help of a sponsor as Lee explains. “We are lucky to have Farmstar, who sponsor the club. They have just provided us with a new Kubota B2261 tractor and also lend us machinery when required. They carry out all of our servicing at competitive rates.”



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**We had Paul Ashcroft, Stadium Head Groundsman from Arsenal here last year to look at the Eclipse system, and he could not believe how few staff we have for the size of the site**



Lee is happy with the kit available to him and the team, but would like to demo the new Dennis Pro 34R rotary clean up mower with a view to purchasing when possible. Lee tells me he finds it cheaper to get a contractor to carry out his aeration and spraying programmes rather than invest in their own equipment. It also gives him more time to get on with the other tasks around the extensive site.

When it comes to pest control, Lee has a big problem with rabbits and moles. "It's a nightmare; half the site has a rabbit fence, but they are very good at digging under that. We are looking at extending the fence around the site, and we have people who come in to help control the population. Moles have started to become a big problem lately, so I have a guy who comes in to set traps. They mainly cause us problems on the outer sand/clay pitches."

There are no further projects planned with the pitches, but the club is going to invest in a perimeter fence to help secure the site. "We are going to put up a prison grade

fence around the whole site, to protect the kids and adults using the facilities. It will also help protect the pitches from any unwanted use during the week, so we can make them as good as we can. We are looking at expanding our car parks as we have a lot of conferences and events at the club during the week and, at present, we can only accommodate around 100-150 cars."

Lee tells me the club are very supportive. They try their best to invest and get what he needs to help improve the facility, as well as funding any training courses that he and his team would like to attend, but this can be difficult.

"I would like to go on more courses and attend seminars, but the problem is time with limited staff available. We had Paul Ashcroft, Stadium Head Groundsman from Arsenal here last year to look at the Eclipse system, and he could not believe how few staff we have for the size of the site."

"I hope to have a catch up with the chairman soon to see if it is feasible to employ two more apprentices, plus



**The top tier is well backed but, when you look at the pitches in our league, the Championship, there are some brilliant groundsman out here doing a grand job with little money**





**I'm fortunate I have a chairman and chief executive who back me, but I know of other groundsmen who could just do with some help financially now and again**

someone who can share the workload with me so that I can have a holiday."

I asked Lee what his thoughts are on the industry when it comes to the standard and funding available for pitch improvements and maintenance, especially in the sport of rugby. "The top tier (Premiership) is well backed but, when you look at the pitches in our league, the Championship, there are some brilliant groundsmen out here doing a grand job with little money. I believe there should be a pot of money made available for

groundsmen to dip into for help, I know the Rugby Football Union are trying to help with machinery and things, but more could be done."

"As I have said before, I'm fortunate I have a chairman and chief executive who back me, but I know of other groundsmen who could just do with some help financially now and again."



### What's in the shed?

- Kubota G26 ride on tractors x 2
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- Toro Timemaster rotary mowers x 2
- Kubota B2261 tractor
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## Exeter Racecourse

# Racing thrives in its natural habitat

Jane Carley discusses the pioneering work being undertaken with padded hurdles at Exeter Racecourse with Clerk of the Course **Barry Johnson** and Head Groundsman **Martin O'Hagan**. So successful have they been, they have also been introduced into Wincanton Racecourse. But, as she discovers, there is much more going on at this West Country track

**W**hilst epitomising the traditional spirit of jumps racing with its heathland track and cosy atmosphere, the team at Exeter Racecourse are not afraid to pioneer new ideas.

Although the full archives were lost when the town was hit by the Blitz, surviving records chart horseracing in Exeter back to the 1660s. The current racecourse at Kennford, on the busy holiday route to Plymouth and beyond to south Cornwall, celebrates its 250th anniversary next year.

The exacting ground standards for modern racing have shifted the programme away from summer to an October to May calendar, with seventeen all-jumps meetings per season.

Exeter is considered by trainers as an ideal education for talented young horses, as a good 'galloping track' where most of the fences have an uphill approach. The flagship Haldon Gold Cup has a roll call of winners including Cue Card, Best Mate and Politologue, whilst the great Kauto Star suffered a rare defeat in the race.

While most racegoers are dedicated jumps racing fans, family days play an increasingly important role, with November's Sunday meeting even featuring a novelty race for Clydesdale heavy horses.

"The area is heathland, and the course was constructed on peaty soil over stone and flint," explains Clerk of the Course Barry

Johnson, who is in his 38th year at Exeter and also oversees Wincanton. "The track drains really well, but the peaty nature of the soil means that the surface breaks up easily, so we have to manage it carefully."

This involves moving rail to fresh ground after every second meeting, whilst judicious infilling and ground improvements are key, says head groundsman Martin O'Hagan.

"We have refurbished all the take-offs and landings in recent years, and use a sand and soil/peat divot mix to give a firmer base. In winter, the mix is 30% soil and 70% sand, whereas in spring it is 50/50. We've also drained wetter areas to get the water off the course and into the ditches."

The move away from summer racing has also offered more flexibility, Barry explains: "We used to have a summer hurdle course on the inside, chase fences in the middle and winter hurdle course on the outside, but the chase fences have now been moved to the outside, which gives double the width for moving the hurdles across onto fresh ground."

Extreme weather conditions in 2018 caused a few headaches - first a meeting was lost in January when an inch of rain fell in twenty-four hours, then repeated light snow falls in the run up to racedays cost two more fixtures in March. To add insult to injury, an October meeting was lost due to hard ground!

"There is no irrigation system as such," comments Barry. "We can water with a





Due to the peaty soil, turf breaks up easily, so is managed by moving the racing line to fresh ground every second meeting



Exeter Racecourse has 35 acres of racing surface plus a large environmentally managed area of centre course and caravan park



The Exeter team left to right: Clerk of the Course Barry Johnson, Neil Lumsden, Matt Johnson, Simon Stead, Scott Butler and Martin O'Hagan



A black high density foam is used in place of birch to form the hurdle

## One jump ahead

**Exeter has pioneered the use of padded hurdles, designed to reduce the risk of horse injuries and, after two seasons' successful use, Barry has also introduced them at Wincanton.**

The design uses a frame similar to a traditional wooden and birch hurdle, but replaces the birch with a high density foam pad.

"They are lighter, so are much easier for the groundstaff to handle and manoeuvre and the design resists damage," explains Barry. "If a horse hits the top rail of a traditional hurdle it tends to break off and the remaining structure can cause injuries to following horses. We would typically have twenty-five broken hurdles at the end of each raceday; now it is five or six."

If the hurdle is hit, the pad tends to spread the shock and it is less likely to fall over, further increasing safety for horses at the back of the field.

The black pad has a slightly different appearance to the birch but Barry comments that while horses may 'step' at the hurdle initially, they soon get used to it.

"We buy twenty new pads a year, and we are now making worn pads available to trainers for building practice fences at their own yards so they can train over them before coming to the racecourse."

Investment in the costly new hurdles was carefully planned - reusing old hurdles in the year before purchase saved some of the £5,000 annual budget, which was added to that year's sum, while the Jockey Club funded a further £12,000.

"In addition to improving safety, we are seeing cost savings," explains Barry. "We now have a quarter of the repairs to do after each raceday - it could take two men a week to repair the hurdles, now it can be completed in a day."



Steeplechase fences are now on the outside of the track, enabling hurdles to be moved across two-thirds of its width

bowser, but it would have taken a lot of water to cover all 35 acres."

After the final meeting of the season in May, attention turns to renovation, with the first job being to renew six of the eleven chase fences each year.

"A percentage of the birch is sourced from local National Trust land which is managed for ground nesting birds," explains Martin. "We cut and collect it, rather than having to purchase from outside sources."

Cleaning the miles and miles of Gilling rail is another task, whilst the summer of 2018 also saw the team install new woodchip canter downs with a further three furlongs to be added in 2019.

"We'll have any drainage work done at this time, and a 2019 project is to get contractors in to re-rubberise the parade ring surface," he comments.

Maintaining grassed areas and spreading fertiliser - sourced from a local agricultural merchant - continues through the summer, whilst there are also staff holidays to fit in.

Mowing is carried out with a 5m

Progressive tri-deck mower, which can take eight hours for the full course. Infield areas, both grassed and heathland, also have to be taken care of.

"Through Jockey Club Racecourses agreement with John Deere, we have a 6090MC tractor which is used for the mower and a 5080R fitted with a loader, plus a 1445 WAM and X950R ride-on for mowing around fences and in public areas," comments Martin. "The tractors are on a lease which means we can renew them every five years and keep the fleet up to date."

A new purchase for this year is a Verti-Drain 7521 decompactor.

"We've previously hired a machine in but this gives us more flexibility - we will Verti-Drain the whole course at the beginning and end of the season, and can treat specific areas as needed. We also have a slitter, but I prefer to Verti-Drain as it is more effective."

Overseeding is a vital part of the repair process, and Barenbrug has supplied a perennial ryegrass mix of 30% Barcristalla, 20% Bareuro, 30% Barlibro and 20%



Barry Johnson in front of a fully built hurdle fence



The parade ring's rubberised surface is due for a revamp in 2019



A complex of 85 stables, including a horse wash down area, await horses travelling to meetings

Copeland to offer winter recovery.

"These varieties will germinate at 4-5 degrees centigrade, so we can use the mix all year if it stays mild," says Martin.

Agronomist Mick Fuller also visits three times a year to advise on soil health.

There are eighty-nine stables with good facilities, including a dedicated horse washdown area; the compact nature of the course means a short walk from the stables to saddling boxes and parade ring. A portion of the centre course is leased to the Caravan Club, providing 103 serviced pitches, managed by the club.

Attention has been paid to improving the raceday experience for even the hardest of supporters: the owners' and trainers' restaurant was doubled in size in 2018, with a new panoramic viewing area; the former tote building converted to offer more undercover viewing and refreshments and hospitality areas refurbished to plush standards.

With its location on a major trunk road, conference business is an important

revenue stream and facility developments have to be flexible enough to accommodate non-racing bookings.

Martin and his team of four groundstaff are kept occupied year-round with racing fixtures, and keeping the public areas spick and span for conferences and grassed areas tidy for events such as scout camps. Stable manager Neil Lumsden, who has been at the track for twelve years, also looks after the parade ring, while Simon Stead, of similar long-standing, has been joined by Matt Johnson and Scott Butler on the track, who are undergoing groundsmanship training.

On racedays, they are assisted by fifty casuals, who help with fences, treading in etc., and twenty-two contractors from Turf Services come in the following day for repairs.

Never a dull moment at the heart of jump racing.



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### What's in the shed?

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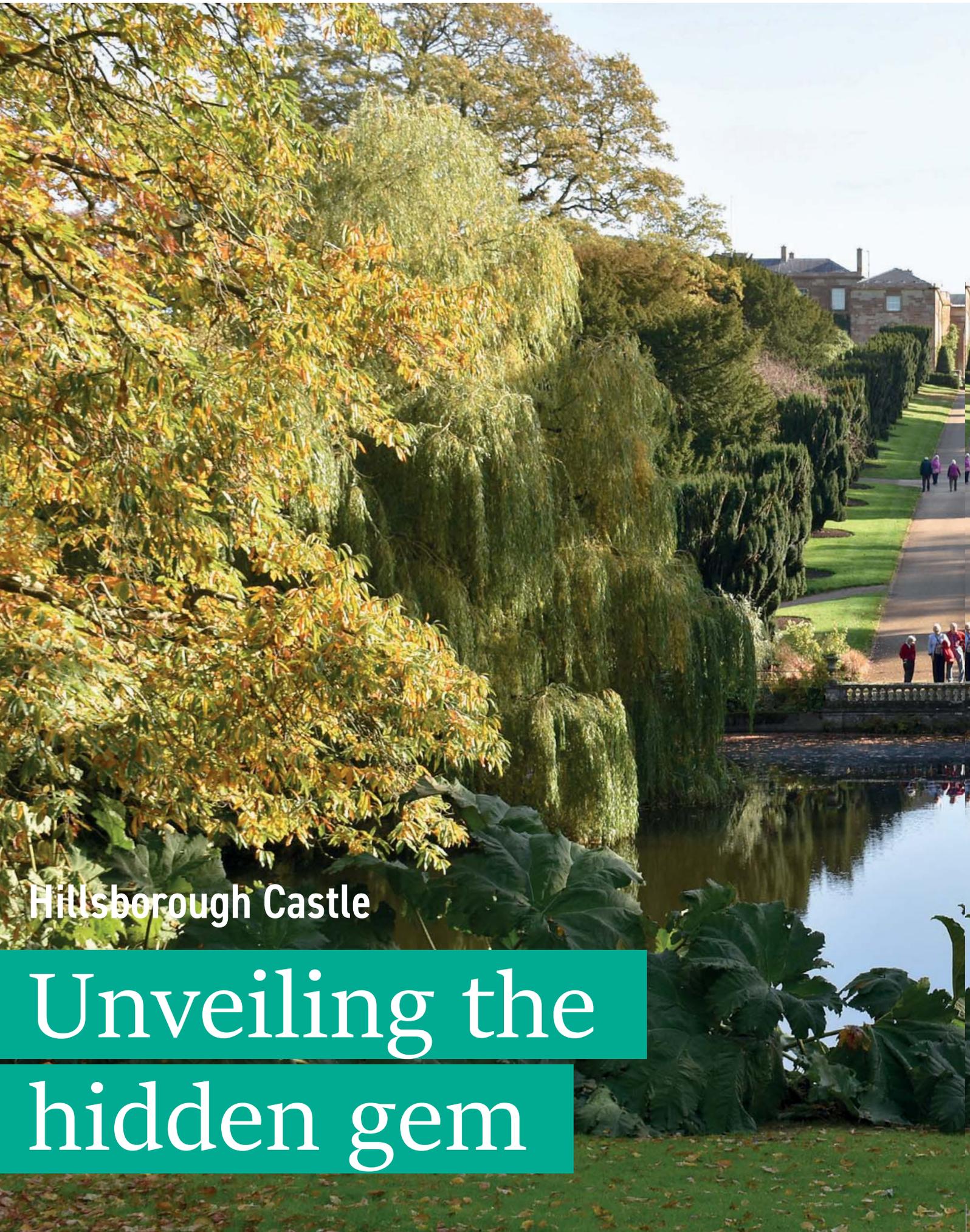
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Hillsborough Castle

# Unveiling the hidden gem



For years the official Royal family residence in Northern Ireland, Hillsborough Castle in County Down, remained closed to the general public due to security concerns. When eventually the doors were opened to visitors, the clientele were said to be of the 'greying generation.' **Chris McCullough** visited the historic estate to investigate plans to transform the site into a visitor attraction appealing to a wider audience

**D**ating back to the late 18th century, Hillsborough Castle started off really as a 'big house' and home to the Hill family - Marquesses of Downshire - which their descendants eventually sold in 1925.

It was bought by the British Government for around £24,000 - which is somewhere in the region of £1.3m in today's money - destined to be the official residence of the Governor of Northern Ireland.

Today, the estate is owned by the Department for Communities and Local Government but, since April 2014, it has been managed by independent charity Historical Royal Palaces which has embarked on an ambitious £20million regeneration programme of both the house and the rolling gardens.

'The Castle@, as it is better known, serves as a home to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and members of the Royal family when any of them are visiting Northern Ireland.

It also hosts a garden party once a year, often attended by various members of the Royal family to recognise the sterling work of people in Northern Ireland, many of whom have contributed to their community or local charities in some way.

However, the big goal is to encourage more of the local public and tourists from further afield to visit Hillsborough Castle and to make it an enjoyable experience for a wider age range, hence the major capital project.

Hillsborough Castle Estate extends to 110 acres, plus there is another ten acres across the road in what is known as the fort. The



**For easier management,  
the entire estate is  
broken down into  
twenty-nine smaller  
character areas that  
require differing  
methods of management**



From left, Adam Ferguson, the Keeper of the Walled Garden; Stephen Martelli, Gardens and Estates Manager; and Martin Bole, Gardens Supervisor

main grounds lie conveniently around the house itself and form a number of attractions, including a walled garden, a lake and a number of picturesque walks.

Heading up a team of ten full-time staff and three other part-time workers as the Gardens and Estates Manager is Stephen Martelli who has worked in this position since Historic Royal Palaces took over the management in 2014.

With over thirty years' experience in horticulture and estate management,

Stephen is the perfect fit to take the new development to the public when it opens in April 2019.

"For easier management, the entire estate is broken down into twenty-nine smaller character areas that require differing methods of management," said Stephen.

"Each area has its own management plan in which we assign the number of hours required and the skills needed. We then have a total number of hours required for the entire site on an annual basis which

helps me control staff numbers, their holidays and other aspects."

"There is also a plan (or a vision) dedicated to each specific area for us to aim for in line with the overall focus of the estate," said Stephen.

An eight acre lake sits amongst a number of garden areas in the estate attracting numerous wildlife and fish species.

Hillsborough Castle's historic gardens, which have been developed since the 1760s onwards, offer visitors unique ornate formal



Stephen Martelli, Gardens and Estates Manager



gardens, woodland and meadows, rare plants and trees, to name a few.

There is even a giant Cornish Red hybrid rhododendron bush sitting opposite the castle measuring forty metres long and thought to be one of the biggest examples in Europe.

Visitors can gently stroll through the famous Yew Tree Walk, the Moss Walk, and now the Lost Garden and take in the ancient ice house and Quaker burial ground.

The new project plans include the opening of the four-acre 18th-century Walled Garden which is the team's most ambitious project to date.

One of Stephen's team, Adam Ferguson, looks after this garden which used to produce fruit, vegetables and flowers.

As part of the Hillsborough Castle Project, the Walled Garden is being restored creating a beautiful working and productive area, complete with dipping pond, crop rotations, seasonal produce, potting sheds, herbaceous borders and an apple orchard.

Adam said: "Gardening has always been a

passion of mine since a very young age. I have always been really interested in getting stuck in and working outdoors."

"I worked at the grounds of Hillsborough Castle for two years before taking on this current role as Keeper of the Walled Garden. It is not a restoration of the original garden, which was built in the 18th century, but is, in fact, a re-imagining of how the layout and the paths were hundreds of years ago.

"It's nice for us to use the methods the gardeners would have used back then, but also for us to bring in the more modern techniques."

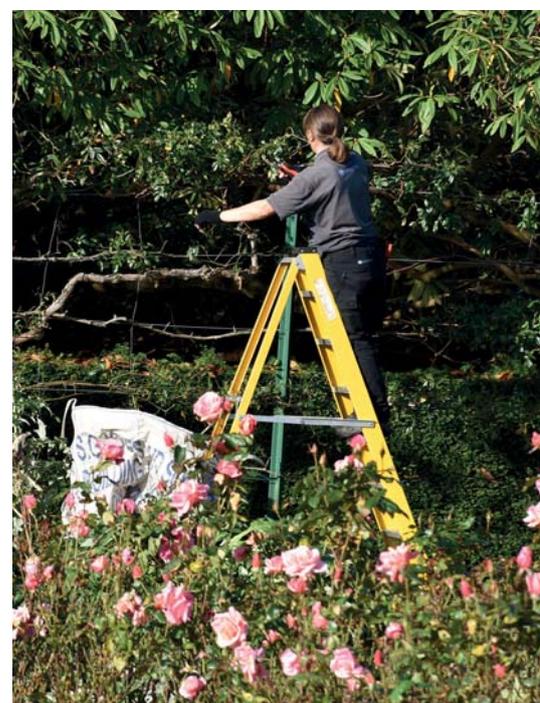
"We want to incorporate methods such as using straw to keep the strawberries from sitting on the soil instead of using a membrane that would be more common now."

"An interesting point of the Walled Garden is the apple and pear trees that grow around the walls, which were planted over fifty years ago and still produce a lot of fruit."

"It's been super to watch this garden develop and I know it will form an interesting



**There is also a plan (or a vision) dedicated to each specific area for us to aim for in line with the overall focus of the estate**



**It is not a restoration of the original garden, which was built in the 18th century, but is, in fact, a re-imagining of how the layout and the paths were hundreds of years ago**





**Now we're restoring this magical hidden gem with the aim of firing imaginations and curiosity through a range of interpretation and learning programmes that bring stories to life through activities, trails and carefully-integrated natural play features**

venue for the visitors next year," he said.

It is hoped the gardens will provide enough food produce for the cafe located nearby to ensure visitors have seasonal produce all year round.

A range of activities are also being developed in the Walled Garden aimed at engaging a wider audience and supporting charitable organisations, schools and partner activities.

These include developing skills through training in horticulture, traditional craft and heritage skills, learning about food and the environment, teamwork and confidence building activities.

#### **The Lost Garden**

Much of the Lost Garden had been overgrown and difficult to access, hence the name. But Stephen and his team are helping to restore this once forgotten beauty which is located south-west of the castle itself.

Stephen said: "Remnants of an ornamental, exotic planting scheme can still

be seen, but much of the garden had been overgrown and difficult to access."

"Now we're restoring this magical hidden gem with the aim of firing imaginations and curiosity through a range of interpretation and learning programmes that bring stories to life through activities, trails and carefully-integrated natural play features."

"We are introducing new paths, bridges and trails to allow visitors to fully explore the extensive grounds which will incorporate three main areas: southern hemisphere planting with a restored island and bridges, wetlands and walkways, and a Chinese glade."

"It is our aim to complete this project in phases with the first part being unveiled in April next year," he said.

#### **Lady Alice's Temple**

Sitting high looking over part of the lake and onto Yew Tree Walk is Lady Alice's Temple where former resident and Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, once found welcome





respite from the pressures of Northern Ireland politics.

Historically, the temple was given as a wedding gift to Lady Alice Hill by her brother, the 5th Marquess of Downshire in 1867.

This temple is also an ideal spot for wedding ceremonies to be held taking in the idyllic settings of the gardens from a number of angles.

#### Granville Garden

One of the other treasured areas within the estate is the beautiful Granville Garden



which was created in the 1940s and 1950s by HM the Queen's aunt; Lady Rose Bowes-Lyon, who was the wife of the Earl of Granville, the second Governor of Northern Ireland. According to the records from the estate, HM the Queen, as a then young princess, and HRH Princess Margaret, would visit their aunt and uncle at Hillsborough Castle.

#### Yew Tree Walk

Running away from the main castle building towards Lady Alice's Temple is Yew Tree Walk, which also passes the Quakers Burial

Ground. This path, lined with Yew trees, was the original road to Moira village which passed in front of the house and into The Square.

It was enclosed during the mid-1800s and is now named after the paired Irish Yew trees that line the path.

On the other side of the temple is the idyllic Moss Walk, so called because a canopy of lime trees run along this path encouraging moss growth at foot level.

Stephen said: "In this area, we were able to identify historic pathways dating back to

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**There are quite a few significant plants in the Moss Walk that we endeavour to protect and thus opened the paths to encourage walkers to stay off the ground beneath the trees**



the 1770s that led through the lime trees and, subsequently, we have replaced those walkways to give visitors another dimension to their visit.”

“It really is a beautiful area, made all the nicer when the sun shines through the trees as you walk past. There are quite a few significant plants in the Moss Walk that we endeavour to protect and thus opened the paths to encourage walkers to stay off the ground beneath the trees,” he added.

On the structural side, in the gardens the team is quite proud that the old toilet block has been developed into a luxurious building for the visitors to spend a penny should they need to.

Although Stephen’s team are kept really busy during the year, this new project will provide them with a super opportunity to apply their skills in maintaining and developing each area of the estate.

Outside specialists are brought in to manage the trees, should they require any

attention, but Stephen and his team can comfortably look after any fallen limbs or remedial work.

There are also hundreds of volunteers who give up their time to come and help out, including students from the local agriculture and horticulture college.

“There are regular volunteers who come in and help us at different stages throughout the year,” said Stephen. “Their service really is invaluable.”

“During this project, we had 100 volunteers pitch in and plant 33,000 bulbs around the estate. Plus we have regular students from Greenmount College who practise various skills in the gardens under tuition from their lecturers and our staff.”

Another important part of the new project at Hillsborough Castle Estate is a biodiversity plan with the aim of encouraging as many areas of flowers and fauna as possible throughout the estate.

“In each area, we will be encouraging



**There are regular volunteers who come in and help us at different stages throughout the year. Their service really is invaluable**





birds to settle there and building bat boxes as well," said Stephen. "Measures will be taken to protect ivy and other plants."

"The biggest push will be to ensure there is a habitat for a diverse range of wildlife in the estate. There are already pine martens here, which has resulted in a natural decline of the grey squirrel which is probably our only pest here, when in high population numbers."

"We also want to improve the overall water quality of the lake to attract more wildlife such as otters and kingfishers."

"In addition, there is a wildflower meadow, or coronation garden, newly created by sowing 330kgs of seed onto twelve acres. This was an effort to recreate a natural meadow that was once common in Northern Ireland during the 1950s and 1960s."

"Here we took soil samples and had it analysed before sourcing the wildflower seed to sow and it will be a real attraction when in full bloom," he said.

To make access easier for visitors, the project has constructed a brand new nine acres car park with entry via the main A1 dual carriageway which runs adjacent to it. It has space for 314 cars, a bus park for twelve coaches and an overflow area to cater for another 600 vehicles.

The team has fitted out the car park with Golpla, a rigid, high quality recycled plastic grass and gravel reinforcement and erosion control system, designed to perpetuate the growth of grass under conditions of intensive vehicular or pedestrian traffic.

A mix of native deciduous, hawthorn, alder, hazel, rowan and sorbus trees have been planted throughout the car park to help it blend in.

In this car park the development crew also found an old agricultural building, which is being preserved and incorporated into the layout of the car park.

If any visitor requires mobility assistance, or for those who are time restricted, a three-



**There are already pine martens here, which has resulted in a natural decline of the grey squirrel which is probably our only pest here, when in high population numbers**



**Here we took soil samples and had it analysed before sourcing the wildflower seed to sow and it will be a real attraction when in full bloom**





carriage people-mover with hydraulic wheelchair access will ensure visitors can travel quickly and easily between the upper and lower end of the estate, with a journey time of approximately five minutes.

A new visitor centre will greet everyone after they park their cars or disembark public transport. A new restaurant will be in place at the visitor centre operated by Yellow Door from Belfast and a shop in situ as well.

Attracting a new demographic of visitor to Hillsborough Castle Estate is the main goal for the new project.

In a normal year, there are around three to six thousand people visit Hillsborough but, with the new estate development completed, Historic Royal Palaces want to increase that to up to 200,000 visitors per year.

This feat can be easily achieved with the new entrance to the site coming off the A1 carriageway which is the main route between Belfast and Dublin.

Stephen added: "The new project is designed to help us change the current mentality of people that Hillsborough Castle is just for older people to visit. We want to make this an attraction for all the family with

children's designated play areas and educational tools to cater for the younger visitor."

"Our location means we are sited so that 75 per cent of the Northern Ireland population can get here in around 45 minutes."

"Plus, with Dublin only being just over one hour away, that opens up a much larger area for us to attract visitors from. There are 105 counties in the UK which have easy transport links to Belfast and seventy cruise ships that dock at the city each year."

"Those are all encouraging statistics for us to ensure Hillsborough Castle Estate looks the best it can after this redevelopment and that we maintain it to be one of the most popular visitor attractions in the country."

"It really is time to unlock this hidden gem in the Historic Royal Palaces portfolio and make it the superior visitor attraction it deserves to be."



### What's in the shed?

- New Holland TN75D tractor
- New Holland Boomer 40 compact tractor
- New Holland T475 tractor
- Manitou 1030S telescopic handler
- Kawasaki 1030 diesel utility vehicle
- Kawasaki 1040 diesel utility vehicle
- Cushman Hauler 1200 petrol utility vehicle
- Volvo ECR25D excavator
- Land Rover Defender 4x4
- Hayter LT324 ride-on triple gang mower
- Ransomes Parkway 3 ride-on triple gang mower
- Ransomes Spider mini remote control mower
- Ransomes HR300 ride-on rotary mower
- John Deere X950R rotary ride-on mower
- Husqvarna 242 chainsaw
- Husqvarna 254 chainsaw
- Ryobi RK-48 brushcutters x 2
- Kaaz TLE26 brushcutters x 2
- Hayter Harrier 56 pedestrian rotary mowers x 4
- Stihl HS86T hedgecutter
- Stihl BR600 blowers x 2
- Stihl HSA86 hedgetrimmer
- Stihl KM90R engine
- Stihl HL-KM135 hedgetrimmer attachment
- Stihl KM-HT pole pruner attachment
- Stihl BR45 drill
- Stihl TS420 power saw
- Echo SRM335 brushcutters x 2
- Stihl BR700 blowers x 2
- Billygoat KV600SP vacuum
- Billygoat hose kit
- Mikassa MVC-82HW vibrating plate
- Billygoat F902SPS pedestrian blower



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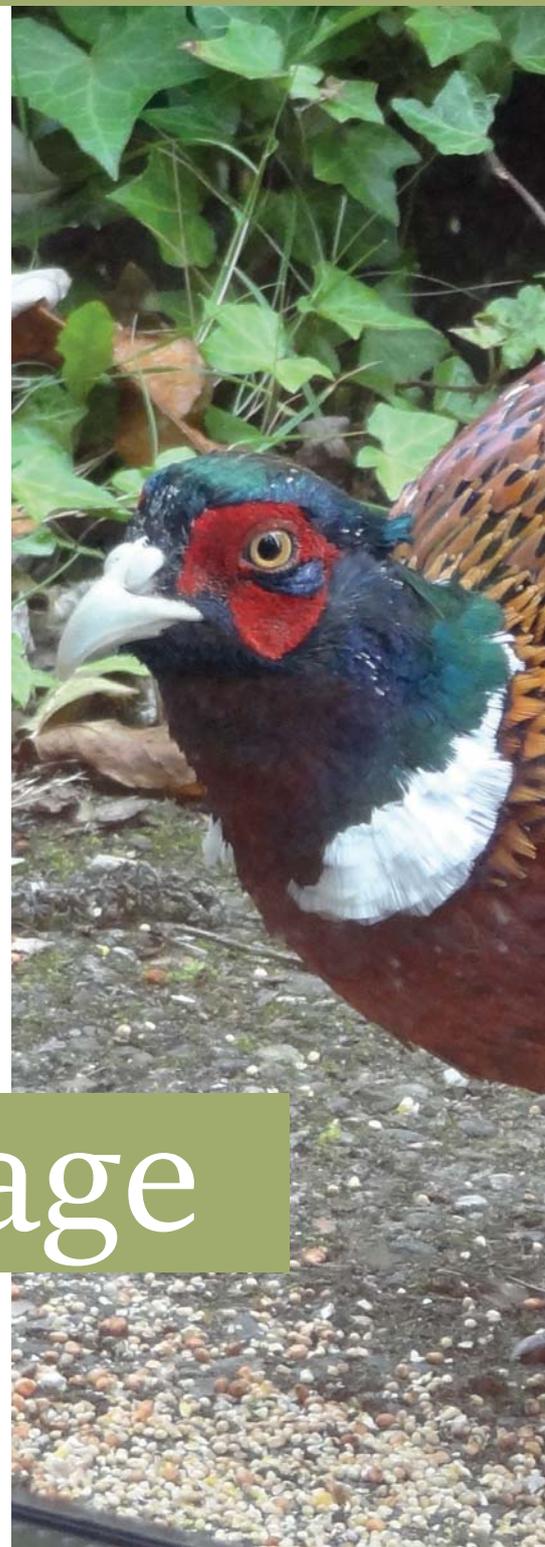
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Common pheasant nest



## Pheasants

# Cultural heritage

Old age provides few consolations, but that my loyal Labrador cross Collie, Sidbury, is becoming increasingly deaf has made one aspect of our winter walks more bearable: he has never liked loud noises, so the period between bonfire night and the end of the shooting season has, until recently, been a cause of distress. Pitchcare Technical Manager, **John Handley** reports

**W**inter walks at the weekend were frequently curtailed by the sound of pheasants being shot; Sidbury would act as if I were beating him, but it would be my hackles that would rise: “Why can’t I enjoy a walk in the countryside without this insufferable shooting?”, “It’s inconsiderate of them to inflict their sport on everyone within hearing distance” and “What pleasure can they get from shooting a bird that has to be forced off the ground in order to be killed?”

At this point, I have to confess to being a walking cliché: I’m a sandal-wearing vegetarian. A liberal product of the BBC with all the self-inflicted angst and doubt

that accompanies such an individual; more inclined to passive-aggressive self-justification than outright confrontation, and my further reaction is to consider the impact upon wildlife generally. So what is actually involved in rearing pheasants to be shot and can it be seen as a positive thing?

Pheasants have followed man’s development of farming for over 5,000 years, from their native range across much of China and Asia to the Black Sea, they are now firmly rooted in much of Europe, North America and New Zealand. The Americans call the pheasant the ring-neck, but many species have no white collar so the name does not make much sense outside of North America.

### History

The pheasant’s formal scientific name is *Phasianus colchicus*. Both *Phasianus* and “pheasant” originally come from the Greek word *phāsīanos*, meaning “(bird) of the Phasis”. Phasis is the ancient name of the main river of western Georgia, currently called the Rioni. Colchicus comes from Colchis, a reference to the mythical visit of Jason and the Argonauts to the Phasis Valley in Colchis, part of modern Georgia on the Black Sea, in search of the Golden Fleece. On Jason’s return to Greece, he supposedly brought back the first pheasants to Europe, possibly around 1300 BC. The Greeks, and later the Romans, appear to have kept them



as table birds. The Romans left recipes and accounts of how to keep them in captivity. Whether or not pheasants were established in Britain in Roman times is open to debate. There are Romano-British mosaic pavements from about the fourth century AD which appear to show pheasants, but these may have been copies from Europe. Even if they had spread to this country, they were certainly not common during the Dark Ages.

More birds were almost certainly brought over by the Normans some time after their invasion in 1066. There are accounts of 'cocks of the wood' being served at banquets although these were very probably black grouse - it is impossible to tell. The next definitive evidence is the Sherborne

Missal, an illuminated manuscript depicting a pheasant in the margin which was probably produced around 1400. After this, evidence starts to become more frequent. They were definitely breeding in the wild at the end of the 1400s, when their nests were protected by royal decree. Their range also began to spread, with records from Scotland and Ireland in the 1600s and slightly later in Wales.

#### **Current practice**

Game shooting is a thriving activity in the UK, worth over £2 billion each year with 83% of shoots relying on hand reared pheasants released into the countryside to supplement wild stocks. For over 100 years, pheasants,



**A recent BASC survey showed that gamekeepers manage around 7.3 million hectares of land in the UK - an area almost the size of Scotland**



**The presence of dogs causes wildlife to move away, temporarily or permanently reducing the amount of available habitat in which to feed, breed and rest**



Extra Large Ringneck Pheasant Chicks

partridge and some duck have been reared on game farms to re-stock shoots. In Britain today there are around 300 game farms, mostly rearing pheasants and partridges. Some retain a breeding flock to produce their own eggs, others buy eggs or day-old chicks and rear them on.

The game farming year starts in February when laying birds are penned for mating and egg production. Eggs are collected daily from April onwards and are hatched in electronic incubators. The chicks are then reared on in purpose-built shelters, where they are provided with food, water, grit and all their other needs. As they grow, the chicks (now known as 'poult') are given access to outdoor runs where they can get used to the natural environment and 'harden off'. In about August, when the birds are some eight to ten weeks of age, they are sold to shoots, where gamekeepers will take over their care, releasing them carefully into the countryside. The shooting season for pheasants in England, Scotland and Wales the season is from 1 October to 1 February (31 January in Northern Ireland). The shot birds enter the human food chain but not all the

birds released will be shot. The remainder live free in the wild, where some will breed naturally the following spring and contribute to the wild stock.

A distinction should be made between rough shooting and driven-game shooting. Rough shooting is where shooters use their dogs to flush game from hedgerows, woods or crops as they walk. Driven game shooting is where a group of shooters stand at given points or pegs across a piece of land and wait for game to fly up, flushed out by a team of beaters and dogs.

The Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) estimates that there are around 30-35 million game birds raised each year - roughly the same size as the UK commercial table egg production flock. The Game Farmers Association (GFA) put the figure for birds reared for release at 20-30 million, of which the majority (80%) are pheasants and most of the rest (16-17%) are Red-leg partridge. The final few percent are Grey partridge and ducks. Quoting the GCT as the source, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) suggest that 20-22 million pheasants are released each summer, with more than 2 million



Melanistic Mutant Ringneck Cross Pheasant



**In the UK, 480,000 people shoot game. It is estimated that the industry supports the equivalent of 70,000 full-time jobs**





Beautiful Golden Pheasants

surviving until spring. Thus, there is a wide range of estimates of the size of the industry. The upper limit equates to some 44,000 tonnes of pheasants!

It is worth pointing out that there are a small number of shoots in lowland Britain where the wild pheasant population is managed for shooting. In this scenario, no birds are brought in and a considerable area of habitat can be managed to yield a limited number of shooting days. An example of this

practice can be seen on the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk.

According to Game Farmers Association (GFA) data, around 40% of pheasants reared come from France, either eggs or as day-old chicks (the transport limit is 24 hours providing it is completed within 72 hours after hatching). The high level of imports is largely due to the competitive pricing of the French stock and the belief in some quarters that the French birds give "better sport".

There is also a small trade in 6-8-week old poults from France. This is likely to be no more than 1-2% of the pheasants reared. The maximum journey time of 12 hours for these birds makes much of the UK out of range for many French game farms, which limits this particular trade, providing transport regulations are followed.

It is understood that hatchability is around 75% for pheasant eggs. Estimates suggest that around 5% of chicks die in the first 2 weeks and a further 5% die prior to being placed in the release pens. The Game Farmers Association (GFA) estimate that around 5-10% of the birds placed into release pens die between release and shooting. The Gamekeepers Conservation Trust (GCT) puts the figure nearer 25%. Birds can perish from starvation, exposure, disease, predation, natural causes or under the wheels of motor vehicles as they begin to range further. Most of the predation of adult birds is by foxes, but mink can be a problem in some parts of the country.

In studies of radio-tagged pheasants it was discovered that between 2.7-5% were killed on the road. This equates to between 0.9 and 1.8 million pheasants each year. The insurance and damage costs of these collisions are unknown, but likely to be substantial.

The world of game shooting is split to some degree in its views on importing birds. Many large commercially-run shoots,



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## Ecological impact

A report written by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in 2010 provided the following summary on the likely impact of gamebirds and shooting:

### Game estate management

- Game estate habitat management includes woodland sky-lighting, planting covercrops, conservation headlands, and more
- It is likely that game estate management, including woodland and farmland habitat management, provision of supplemental food, and predator control increases the numbers of some bird groups, particularly warblers, finches and ground feeders
- Estate management also benefits some small mammals, particularly wood mice and bank voles

### Direct impacts of gamebirds

- Gamebirds, mostly pheasants, modify woodland ground flora within release pens, through browsing and soil enrichment
- Pheasants at high densities can modify hedgerow and hedgebank floral structure, and this may have knock-on effects for hedge nesting birds
- Pheasants reduce the biomass of overwintering ground-active invertebrates and caterpillars that are important food resources for breeding birds
- Breeding gamebirds may compete with native birds for invertebrate resources
- Gamebirds on moorland fringe habitat threaten rare and endangered bryophyte communities, and may impact on red grouse and other fragile moorland bird species

### Gamebirds and disease

- Pheasants may spread numerous parasites to wild birds, particularly at feeders

### Shooting practices

- Birds of prey and other animals suffer lead poisoning following the consumption of gamebirds that are shot but not collected
- Spent lead shot on game estates is ingested by some birds, leading to poisoning at sufficient concentrations
- Lead shot in the environment may escalate the food chain from soil invertebrates to small mammals to predators
- Unintentional by-catch of grey partridge results in population impacts on this declining species

### Impacts on predators and predation dynamics

- Predator abundance may be increased by excess prey abundance in the form of gamebirds. Predators such as foxes and corvids may become more ubiquitous, and protected predators, such as raptors may also benefit
- At the end of the shooting season, gamebirds may be reduced to such an extent that predators sustained at elevated numbers due to abundant overwinter prey may switch to other prey types. This period of low gamebird abundance coincides with the nesting season for most bird species, and over-abundant predators may have detrimental effects on nesting birds
- Some gamekeepers persecute protected predators such as birds of prey, particularly buzzards and goshawks, which are perceived as threats to gamebirds



particularly in the southern counties of England, opt for French stock. They require large numbers of birds, and price is an issue as they are competing in the top class world of corporate entertainment and recreation where margins are slim. The more traditional approach to game shooting is for release of moderate numbers of birds from locally sourced eggs. This system is less price-competitive, gives a degree of in-built biosecurity and could be viewed as being more sustainable.

The Gamekeepers Association of Britain and Northern Ireland was incorporated into the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) in 1975. BASC has 5,500 gamekeeper members, the majority of whom, it suggests, will also be members of the National Gamekeepers Organisation. In addition, 75% of its 122,000 members are actively involved in game shooting and land management.

A recent BASC survey showed that gamekeepers manage around 7.3 million hectares of land in the UK - an area almost the size of Scotland. The Game Conservation Trust (GCT) estimates that there is in excess of 10,000 holdings where pheasants are reared. The National Gamekeepers Organisation, however, believe this figure is too high.

### Economics

Fertile (hatching) eggs are around 40p each. Day old chicks currently cost between 60p and £1.00. Six to seven week-old poults are £3.50 each. There is also a limited market

for 10 (or so) week old growers (i.e. out of the release pens) with prices ranging between £6.50 and £7 each. Prices will vary with demand and quantities traded.

The shot pheasant is worth only around 50p. The market is driven by the sale of the actual shooting. Costs for a shoot can vary enormously. One day's shooting can be between £25 and £35 per bird shot. The cost of a day's shooting varies between £100/gun for a smaller shoot, to £1000s/gun on a larger shoot. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation suggest that on smaller syndicates a full gun can be less than £350 for the season.

The BASC state that 80% of birds shot in the UK are exported to the Continent, with Belgium being a key market. Efforts are being made to increase domestic consumption, through, for example Game-to-Eat, a promotional body for the sector, which provides information and recipes to the public and is supported by celebrity chefs.

In the UK, 480,000 people shoot game. It is estimated that the industry supports the equivalent of 70,000 full-time jobs, and shooters spend £2 billion each year on goods and services. However, the objective of just 18% of shoot providers is to make a profit, as for most, shooting is a hobby. Each year £91 million is spent on eggs/chicks reared either in the UK or France, and of birds shot approximately 46% of pheasants and 37% of partridge are sold to dealers for human consumption, the rest being consumed by the shooting providers and



**When the birds are some eight to ten weeks of age, they are sold to shoots, where gamekeepers will take over their care, releasing them carefully into the countryside**

the shooters. 2.7 million man-days per year are spent undertaking estate management, equivalent to 12,000 full-time jobs, and each year £12 million is spent on cover crop seed.

The overall perspective is that the impacts of gamebirds and gamebird shooting practices span multiple disciplines, but few have been extensively investigated. The data available shows that at high densities of gamebird release, negative environmental impacts are likely to occur, and may in some cases be severe. In the majority of cases however, where densities are moderate, it is likely that impacts are minor or may be offset by beneficial habitat management. In areas where good habitat management is combined with low release densities, or in areas that work to promote breeding populations of gamebirds, impacts may be largely positive.

However, the impact of my dog-walking activities may not be as benign as I'd assumed, according to a paper written recently. The evidence that dogs negatively impact wildlife is overwhelming. It is clear

that people with dogs - on leads or off - are much more detrimental to wildlife than people without dogs.

1. **Physical and temporal displacement.** The presence of dogs causes wildlife to move away, temporarily or permanently reducing the amount of available habitat in which to feed, breed and rest. Animals become less active during the day to avoid dog interactions. Furthermore, the scent of dogs repels wildlife and the effects remain after the dogs are gone.
2. **Disturbance and stress response.** Animals are alarmed and cease their routine activities. This increases the amount of energy they use, while simultaneously reducing their opportunities to feed. Repeated stress causes long-term impacts on wildlife including reduced reproduction and growth, suppressed immune system and increased vulnerability to disease and parasites.
3. **Indirect and direct mortality.** Dogs

transmit diseases (such as canine distemper and rabies) to and from wildlife. Loose dogs kill wildlife.

4. **Human disease and water quality impacts.** Dog waste pollutes water and transmits harmful parasites and diseases to people.

So what is my conclusion? Another aspect of getting older is an increasing capacity to reflect on my experience. Tolerance is also a liberal value, it requires a willingness to engage, learn and attempt to understand somebody else's perspective. To be willing to share the same space knowing that this may involve a certain amount of discomfort, and the more I become aware of this, the more I recognise that it's generally my own entrenched views, generally based upon very little evidence, which is the cause of my own discomfort. I enjoy seeing pheasants, they are such gaudy birds and their presence within the landscape is undoubtedly part of our cultural heritage. I'd miss them if they weren't put there.



In my first month interviewing a variety of groundsmen and greenkeepers, it's been good to see that they all have aeration programmes in place throughout the season. Whether they carry out the process internally with their own equipment, or get contractors in, they understand the benefits regular aeration provides turf surfaces.

I had a look back through the Pitchcare website to see if there was any information on the benefits of aeration and what is available, and I picked up on a good article from June 2012 (also featured in Pitchcare Magazine Issue 42 for any of you who have a back catalogue).

So I thought it might be a good time to briefly point out the key benefits of a regular

aeration programme, and to look at any new aeration machines that have come onto the market since that article was written and that are making a difference.

#### Why aerate?

A well-structured soil contains equal volumes of air and water in the pores that lie between the solid matter. Drainage is, basically, water movement down through this pore space. Roots also grow in this pore space. Any compression of the space taken up by air will adversely affect drainage and root development, thus plant health.

Aeration is any mechanical treatment that sustains or increases the airspace within the soil profile, thus producing better drainage and healthier turf. A well-aerated soil will support a strong microbial population, which

brings many benefits to grass growth and the digestion of organic matter. The result of compression of the airspace within the soil is known as compaction.

#### Problems caused by compaction

- Poor drainage
- Weak grass growth
- Shallow root development
- Increased thatch accumulation
- Annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) promotion
- An inconsistency of turf vigour, firmness and receptiveness
- Unreceptive soils
- Increased drought stress

## Aeration

# Progress and importance

**Lee Williams** looks at progressions in aeration and offers a timely reminder of why it remains such an important procedure in the turf maintenance programme





Wiedenmann Terra Spike close-up



John Deere Aercore

- Promotes better surface levels that will increase ball roll/speed.
- Aids surface firmness/dryness, thereby increasing ball bounce and surface grip

**How do we aerate?**

There is a wide variety and choice of aeration equipment available out there, new and used, providing different tine sizes, operating widths and shattering features that can meet the requirements of any facility.

- Manual methods: hand fork, Sisis Aerdrain Fork and sarrel spiking roller (all available through the Pitchcare website). Ideal for small areas
- Pedestrian aerator/corer machines: lightweight and can be fitted with a variety of tine options, solid/hollow coring tines
- Tractor mounted aerator/corer machines: various sizes available and can be fitted with a variety of tine options, solid/hollow core tines
- Tractor mounted 'verti-drain' type machines: various sizes available, ideal for deep compaction
- Pedestrian 'verti-drain' type machines
- Disc/blade implements (linear aerators): designed to open up the ground and backfill with porous materials
- Pedestrian and tractor mounted compressed air and water injection



**Aeration is any mechanical treatment that sustains or increases the airspace within the soil profile, thus producing better drainage and healthier turf**

**Benefits of aeration**

- Relieves compaction
- Promotes proliferation and health of beneficial soil microbes
- Increases root development
- Improves drainage
- Promotes healthy strong grass growth
- Improves soil surface drainage (water infiltration)
- Helps to increase soil temperatures
- Increases soil pore space - allows gaseous exchanges in the soil (oxygen in, carbon dioxide out) that improves root growth and development
- Aids integration of topdressings into the soil profile, and the breakdown of thatch/organic matter



Charterhouse Verti-Drain



Groundsman Aerator



Wiedemann Terra Spike



Sisis Aer-Aid

aerator systems

- Drill and fill techniques

More importantly, do not disturb the playing surface, allowing play to continue after use.

It is essential to use a variety of aeration techniques to prevent pan layers being created. This usually happens if you continue to use the same aeration technique set at the same depth, resulting in a compacted layer forming at the base of the tine or core depth. Most turfgrass managers will use different methods of aeration by changing the depths, size and diameter of tines.

**So, what's new?**

The most significant progression in the aeration market since 2012, that I can think of, is the Air2g2. I first saw this machine in action whilst in sales in 2013. From the beginning, I was impressed and thought it had a place in the market as it reminded me of the old Robin Dagger I used when I was a greenkeeper at Haydock Park Golf Club, which did an excellent job spot treating heavily compacted areas on the fairways.

Whilst at Oldham Athletic AFC, we invested in this machine as it was lightweight and enabled us to break up compaction deep down when the pitch was too wet for us to get the tractor and verti-drain on the main pitch.

The Air2G2 324 uses three probes to laterally inject pressurised air up to 12-inches beneath the surface of the soil, in a

diameter of up to 9 feet, reaching deep into the soil profile. Compacted layers form as a result of foot traffic, mechanical traffic and nature's daily wear and tear. These laterally injected air blasts loosen compacted soil immediately, without any disruption to the surface of the turf or the roots below.

The injected air relieves compaction, increases porosity and enhances respiration which, in turn, allows water to drain quickly and promotes gas exchange. But, most importantly, it does so with little or no disturbance to the turfgrass surface or the roots below and doesn't leave a trace of cores to clean up afterwards.

Using the Air2G2 helps with:

- **Compaction:** fractures hardpan layers without disruption to roots or playing surfaces
- **Porosity:** Lateral air injections increase pore space, promote faster drainage and root development

- **Respiration:** Forces oxygen in and pushes CO2 and other anaerobic gases out for rootzone gas exchange



Air2G2

With frequent use, using the Air2G2 324 creates surfaces that are healthy, firm and ready for play immediately after treatment. Air is everything to anything that lives, and for your soil, the Air2G2 324 is a breath of fresh air.

Lee Williams,  
Pitchcare Technical  
Journalist



Toro Pedestrian ProCore



John Deere Pedestrian Aercore



Machinery

# Delivery and Installation

**Nigel Church**, Product Trainer with Cutting Edge Training, an operating division of Ransomes Jacobsen, looks at machinery delivery and installation, and says there is more hard work involved in getting the sale, arranging the delivery and completing the installation correctly than you might have thought

It is that time of year when thoughts start to turn towards annual budgets, maintaining machinery fleets, and hopefully the purchase of new machinery to meet the challenges of 2019. Whilst your decisions on the purchase are difficult, they are only part of the process. There are several elements that the professional machinery dealer or supplier must complete as well, and they are essential if the purchase is to be a success.

#### The purchase

Quite often, purchasing machinery involves team discussions and meetings, demonstrations, negotiations and probably

yet further meetings, before you can place an order. The delivery of any new piece of equipment should be the culmination of the process, and it should confirm to you, and your team, that you have purchased the right piece of kit, from the right brand, from the right dealer, and from the right salesman!

#### Pre-delivery inspection

The supplier, which could be either your local dealer, a distributor, or a manufacturer who deals directly, should have prepared the machine for your use. This may include assembling the machine from a packing crate, or building the machine to the ordered specification, 2- or 4-wheel drive



Machinery delivery is an exciting time; plenty of time should be set aside for a thorough installation

transmission system, different cutting unit options, or accessories like turf groomers and/or grass collection systems. Tractors could have pick-up hitches or auxiliary hydraulic service couplings added, or a front-end loader fitted as part of the build-up. This all takes time and must be scheduled into the workshop to get it completed correctly and on time. That's why it is so important to check the specification of the machine at the time of ordering, so you get what you think you have ordered, not something else.

The pre-delivery inspection (PDI) should check and test the function of the machine and its accessories, ensure that options like

PTO shafts are cut to the correct length, and mowing heights set correctly for you. Tyre pressures, weight transfer settings and numerous other settings do need to be checked and set for you. You should be asked about all these details as part of the delivery process, so that the machine is ready to go on delivery, without additional delays.

#### **The delivery**

There should be an appointment made for the delivery, and some time booked with you and the main operators of the machine to run through a structured installation. Delivery is an exciting time, and it needs to be planned into the day, so there is enough

time for the supporting machinery installation to take place. Your dealer will tell you how long this process should take, and your key staff will need to be available for the installation.

#### **The installation process (what you should get!)**

There is a legal requirement under section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for all suppliers of machinery to ensure that the customer is given adequate information about the machine. There is also a requirement to do what is "reasonably practicable" to supply equipment that is safe for use.



**If there isn't a suggestion of a formal installation, or any supporting paperwork to confirm this was indeed completed, you should question this with the dealer or supplier and ensure that the machinery is installed to your satisfaction**

So, simply supplying you with the machine and the operator's instruction book, whilst giving you access to all the information you are likely to need, is unlikely to meet the above requirement, and therefore some form of installation training must take place.

As a manager or the employer, you also have a duty to provide adequate training for your staff, so receiving good quality machinery installation is the minimum requirement for even experienced staff, when an unfamiliar piece of equipment arrives.

Note: this would be required for any machinery delivery, whether it be new, used, purchased, hired or borrowed, for use at work.

If there isn't a suggestion of a formal installation, or any supporting paperwork to confirm this was indeed completed, you should question this with the dealer or supplier and ensure that the machinery is installed to your satisfaction. If it is not, it could then become your legal responsibility to install the machinery with your own staff. That will take time, effort and detailed product knowledge to complete.

**BAGMA installation:**

BAGMA (the British Agricultural & Garden Machinery Association) has an HSE approved installation training course for all dealers and machinery suppliers. This approved code of practice shows what should be covered on a machinery installation.

You will also get a copy of the installation form, so you have a record of the training provided to your team, for your internal staff training records.

The installation should be based around



\* The manufacturer conducts stringent tests on its machinery, including noise testing\*

the operator's instruction book, and illustrate the key pieces of information in it, which, under the BAGMA system would include the following 20 key points:

- Operator responsibility and risk assessment
- Operators instruction book
- Safe systems of work
- PPE
- Noise and vibration levels
- Safety guards
- Safety interlocks (OPC systems)
- Safety signs and lights
- Pre-start checks
- Tyre condition and wheel fixings
- Levers and controls
- Safe Stop procedure
- Handbrake and brake operation
- Starting and stopping
- Warning devices
- Lights, reflectors, indicators, mirrors and

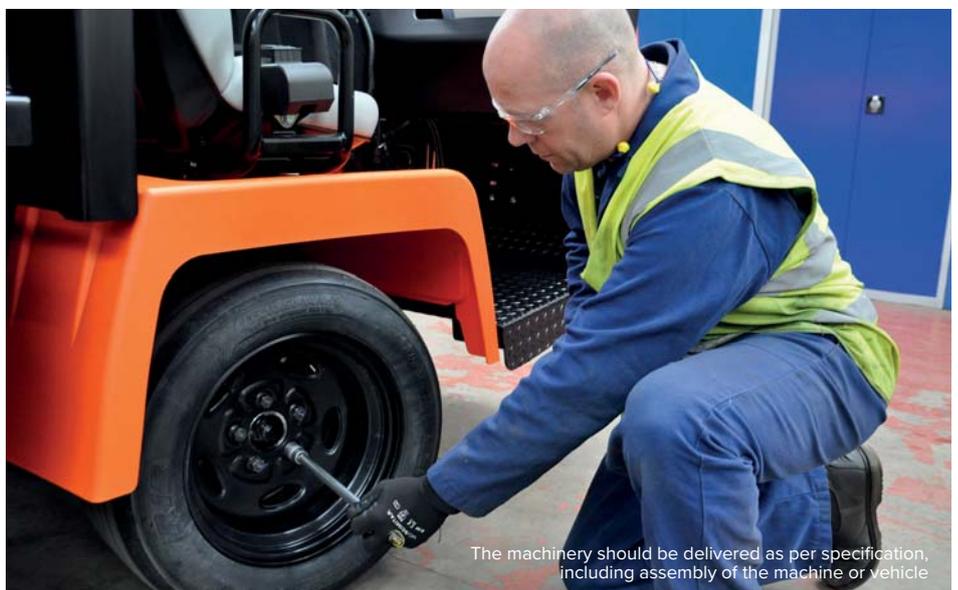
flashing beacons

- Steering mechanisms
- Procedures on slopes
- Machine adjustments and maintenance
- Operator training information

That's quite a list and, for self-propelled machines, it all needs to be covered. A strimmer wouldn't need tyres or steering, of course, but the noise and vibration values would be important for your risk assessments and staff awareness regarding their personal protection equipment (PPE) and vibration exposure.

So, you should expect your supplier to request at least an hour of your time to fully install the machine with you and, if it's a multiple machinery purchase, then this could take a lot longer to complete.

Driving and operating the machine will not be part of the installation process, as it is unlikely that the installer is qualified to instruct. For that, you will need some additional training with a qualified instructor.



The machinery should be delivered as per specification, including assembly of the machine or vehicle



Additional operator training may be required

### Additional training

Installation training is not operator training! Experienced operators, given a good installation, should be able to safely operate a machine which is new to them. However, new or inexperienced operators will need additional training to ensure that they can safely and competently operate a piece of machinery. Operator training courses are available, and you should discuss this with your local dealer.

The bigger manufacturers may be able to offer in-house certified training, and there are also experienced, independent trainers who can deliver certified training for your staff.

You do have a legal requirement to provide adequate training for your staff and, while internal training can be enough, the purchase of new machinery is a great time to get some additional structured training for your team.

Remember to discuss this when placing an order for a new machine. Your supplying

dealer may well be able to arrange the training for you. Think of it as an essential accessory for the new machinery you are looking to purchase, and perhaps get it included in the machinery deal.

### A marketing opportunity for all parties

Any purchase is an investment in the fleet, the facilities and the club/organisation. It's good news for all, as everyone should get the benefit from it. So, make the most of it by getting some positive news out there!

The typical "grip and grin" photos of new machinery being delivered, showing the machinery and the staff are always a good idea. If there is additional training for the staff, then this should also be highlighted, as it shows staff development, professional standards, and efforts to operate and maintain the new investment correctly.

Local press and the wider trade publications all love a good news story about machinery sales and happy customers, so when the machinery arrives,



**You do have a legal requirement to provide adequate training for your staff and, while internal training can be enough, the purchase of new machinery is a great time to get some additional structured training for your team**

get the camera out and get some good shots. Remember, your camera phone won't take a good enough image for printing purposes, so get someone with a good quality camera to take some for you. A few words about the machinery, the buying experience and the difference the new machinery will make should do the job for you.

Always remember to thank the supplying dealer and the staff who have made all this happen. There is more hard work involved in getting the sale, arranging the delivery and completing the installation correctly than you might have thought.



New machinery is a great marketing opportunity for your facility as well as the manufacturer



## HMP Holme House

# Holme help

Pastoral care for prisoners plays a key part of **Andy Flanagan's** day managing the gardens and grounds team in HMP Holme House, as Greg Rhodes reports

**T**he imposing perimeter walls of HMP Holme House hide the scale of operation that Horticultural Instructor Andrew Flanagan and the gardens department team have to wrestle with.

The Stockton-on-Tees prison, opened in 1992, holds 1,210 Category C prisoners, most of whom are actively engaged in life- and career-improving programmes to help prepare them for their return to the community.

Originally Category B, Holme House became Category C in March 2018 under a general operational restructuring.

Within the outer curtain wall runs an equally awe-inspiring lattice steel fence, topped with a double curl of barbed wire.

That said, walking the 52-acre site is anything but claustrophobic and the diversity of provision across the estate is eye-opening.

In post since 2015, Andy manages a challenging yet fulfilling groundcare programme, largely delivered by Holme House prisoners under his supervision and that of fellow horticultural instructor Les Gray, 57, who's clocked up ten years here.

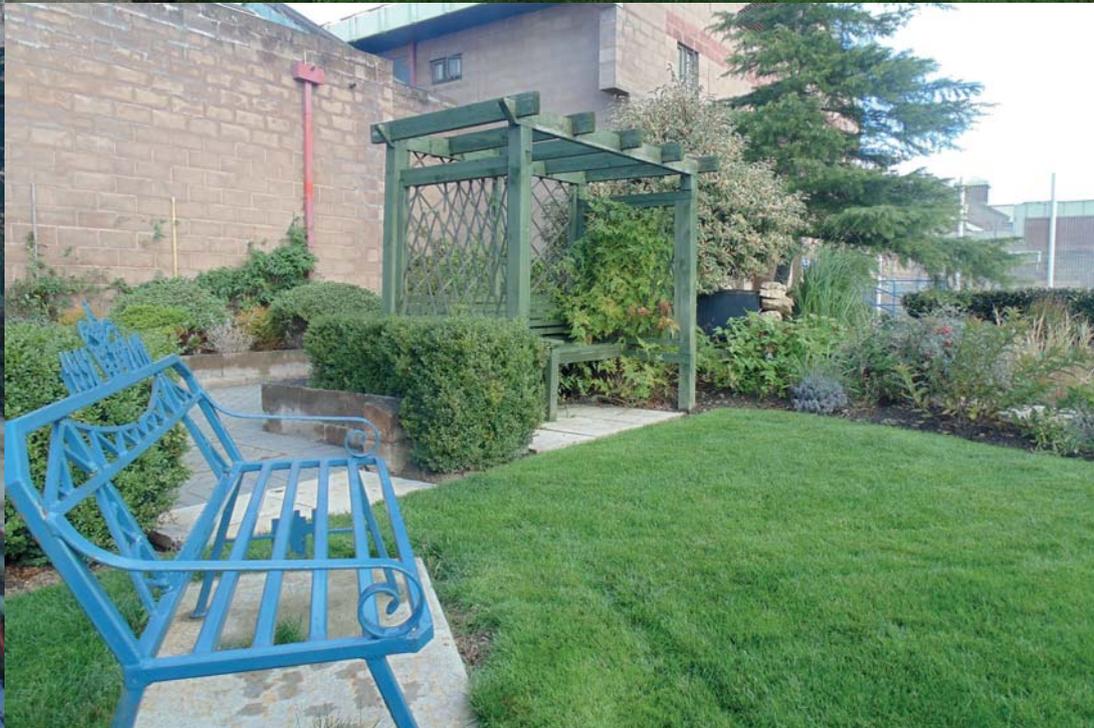
"This is a big operation," says Andy understatedly. "Some 60% of the acreage is grass and my priority is to make it all look as attractive as possible."

"As we have such a huge area to handle, Les co-ordinates the greenhouse work, planting out the beds and filling the planters."

"A major part of the work is creating an attractive face for prisoners, visitors and staff. Several areas are planned to be improved with plantings and landscaping, which will further raise the presentation and enjoyment for all."

The Gardens Department falls under the prison's Land Based Activities (LBA), managed by Jeff Wingfield, 56, who also oversees the waste management function and commands thirty-one years' experience in Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS).

"All prisoners receive a full induction course then a horticultural workright programme," Jeff explains. "Successful candidates can then progress to a City & Guilds Horticultural Skill Tests and NVQ certificated accreditation, so they leave here



with a record of achievement.”

Work areas cover turfcare, greenhouses, shrubs and borders, sports surfaces and the waste management unit - plenty of scope for prisoners to try their hand and train up in various sector disciplines.

“We train the team in handling various machinery and practices used within horticulture,” Andy adds, “plus the different aspects and processes applied in caring and maintaining a synthetic sports surface.”

“They are involved in all aspects of greenhouse production,” he continues, “from seed sowing, plant propagation, hanging baskets and vegetable production.”

“Training in shrubs and borders covers planting protection, training and supporting,

pruning, mulching, firming and feeding - so we enable them to undertake a full programme of activity.”

Activity and education rank high in Holme House priorities. Prisoners can keep fit indoors within the extensively equipped gym or train outside in all exercise areas that also include fixed exercise frames and equipment.

Meeting perennial demand for football, the three-quarter size 3G pitch looks resplendent, belying its age. “The technical services department installed it seven years ago,” Andy explains, “replacing the original full-size sand-filled pitch due to building expansion, when another three house blocks were added to the four previously on site, nearly doubling the number of

prisoners,” Andy explains.

Immaculately maintained, the surface sees action four or five times a week, Andy adds. “Our Countax mini tractor and the comb, brush and roller attachments keep the surface in great condition. The pitch also stages PADS courses, when Army trainers descend for a fortnight’s drills three times a year, but it’s mainly used for football.”

Prisoners working in LBA have to include Maths and English embedded learning as part of their engagement with prison regimes - the programmes Prison Industries division runs.

In charge of that is Maxine Gunn, who currently runs this side of things from a small but highly ordered classroom cum



**I tell them to view their day as coming to work and aiming to get the site looking as attractive as they can, whilst making the best from a bad situation, which being in prison is, of course. They seem to take that on board as seldom, if ever, do we encounter a problem**



office. The prisoners team has recently laid foundations for its larger, modular timber-framed successor behind the greenhouses.

“I’m just one cog in a big educational wheel,” she notes. “I assess needs in Maths and English, which are embedded in prisoners’ jobs, and focus on functional and applied aspects, such as asking them how many flowers they would need to plant within a designated area or how to measure out stripes to a set width.”

Evidence of the practical skills and artistry prisoners bring to the site is everywhere.

A splendid timber bird table, assembled in the expansive wood shop, adorns the Prison Governor’s Garden, which his office overlooks, whilst a pair of dramatic hexagonal wooden planters straddle the entrance to the garden to

complement beds bustling with colour, trees and eye-catching striped lawn.

Elsewhere, the team created their own sensory garden, complete with shrub and herb planters surrounded by aquatically inspired mural art on the walls.

To the rear of the greenhouses, vegetable planters

constructed by the prisoners are inscribed ornately with the words: ‘Gardening - cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes’ and another with ‘Trespassers will be composted’. The output is not purely for internal application. The gardens department has linked with a community garden scheme in Peterlee, supplying ‘Old English’ styled signs for it.

Andrew Pepper, 56, Band 3, Gardens Maintenance, manages the external areas fronting the main entrance and the bund at the rear, which requires chippers and chainsaws to keep it under control. “Although one of the team, Andrew works exclusively outside, which is a big task in itself,” Andy notes.

Terry Mallerby, 60, a Band 4 member of the team, co-ordinates the waste management function, with Derek Pears, 67, and Colin Steer, 57, working with prisoners assigned to this aspect of land-based activities.

Given the size of the prison population here, the scale of the operation is necessarily vast. “Prisoners have the opportunity to sort their own waste for recycling,” Andy says. “Waste paper is shredded and bailed, cardboard compacted and bailed and tins, clothing and bedding sorted, ready for the waste management operator, which collects three times a week.”

Andy, still only 30, came to Holme House in early 2015 as a Band 3 Horticultural Instructor and holding a wealth of experience in turf management. “The bands reflect length of service and qualification,” he explains. “I’m Band 3, whilst Les is Band 4 and Jeff Band 5.” Qualified to Level 3 in Horticulture and Level 3 in Sportsturf, he also holds PA1 and PA6 spray licences.

Holme House presented a dramatic change in Andy’s career. Starting out straight from school in 2005 at 15, he took a fortnight’s work experience at Hartlepool United FC in what proved a true trial of his ambitions.

“My first job was sweeping and painting



**Vegetable planters constructed by the prisoners are inscribed ornately with the words: ‘Gardening - cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes’ and another with ‘Trespassers will be composted’**

the stands - a test to see if I was cut out for groundsmanship. Then, in the closed season, I helped prepare the pitch for renovation.”

The club asked Andy back for a further three weeks and invited him to stay on full time as their apprentice. “I jumped at the chance, completing my qualifications at East Durham College Houghall over the next two years.”

His seven and a half years there were marked by a period of groundcare excellence at the club, he remembers “The club was often in the news, nominated for various awards, including Pitch of the Year three times. The then head Dave Brown secured a Groundsman of the Year accolade, with Andy himself runner-up Young Groundsman of the Year in 2011. “Dave was my mentor - he taught me everything about the sportsturf industry,” Andy recalls fondly. “I loved working there.”

A “lack of opportunity to progress” however prompted a move. Born and bred locally in Hesleden, County Durham, Andy stayed close by, taking up the assistant grounds manager post at Sedgefield Racecourse in 2012. “Horseracing is my

sporting passion,” he reveals, and I had the chance to see it up close, working under Clerk of the Course Phil Tuck, a former jockey and Cheltenham Gold Cup winner. He’s now racing adviser to the king of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh.”

His ambitions thwarted once again by lack of opportunity, Andy spotted the Holme House post advertised, which noted the role of teaching prisoners about turfcare and horticulture. “A fresh challenge and certainly a different environment,” he says.

The whole aim is to give prisoners job satisfaction and qualifications via purposeful activity under a process of rehabilitation that prepares them for release. They’re a good team and deliver professional results in difficult circumstances.

“We liaise with outside agencies in search of job opportunities for them,” Andy explains. “Councils were once a valuable source, but not any more due to budget cutbacks. Many prisoners seek to set up on their own as gardeners and they are well-qualified for that career when they leave here.”

After Andy’s 7.30am meeting with Jeff to set the day’s schedule, he and Les prepare

for the prisoners to enter Land Based Activities for their 8.00am to 4.00pm shift. Hands on with the team at all times, Andy and his colleagues in turn allocate daily duties across the site.

“The same twenty men come to LBA for daily garden duties. The waste bins party numbers around fifteen working in shifts seven days a week, so a total of thirty-five men will be in land based production on any day.”

“Prisoners choose the activities they wish to undertake in Holme House. Some select educational courses, others prefer working outside as part of our team. After receiving their induction pack covering Health & Safety procedures, the LBA contingent undertakes a fortnight’s probation in horticulture.”

The gardens team is in constant touch with the communications room during the day. “We ask them for permission to move around the site to do the jobs, returning to base around 11.00am to 11.15am to clean machinery, replace it in the shed and check that no tools are missing. If anything is, we’re in big trouble. Relax over a cuppa then they’re off for their dinner before they return

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**Prisoners choose the activities they wish to undertake in Holme House. After receiving their induction pack covering Health & Safety procedures, the LBA contingent undertakes a fortnight's probation in horticulture**



to us an hour later for the afternoon session."

The gardens team aren't idle then though. "I go to the gym over lunch, and Les goes every day too - all part of staff wellbeing. I've shed six stone in the last two years. I'm now 11st 8lb. Changing lifestyle has helped, as well as exercise and I only drink water now."

Eternal vigilance is burned into the team's psyche. "I had to take a course in personal safety techniques when I arrived and these are updated periodically so we are prepared for eventualities. We're all equally equipped to defend ourselves. Then there were all the call signs and the radio language to master too. Jeff, Les and I are the team's First Aiders and we are also qualified to drive forklifts."

Andy's duties, embracing all grassed and turfed areas, plant propagation and hard/soft landscaping, keep him busy, but the physical work only forms part of the story for him. "For me, it's about helping men on a new path and direction. Things don't always work out for them, but we try to put pride back into them so they can say 'I've done that' when they walk round the site."

"I tell them to view their day as coming to work and aiming to get the site looking as attractive as they can, whilst making the best from a bad situation, which being in prison is, of course. They seem to take that on board as seldom, if ever, do we encounter a problem."

"They are on course to learn life skills and horticulture to help make them better people. If they were not aiming for that, they would not be working in Land Based Activities."

"Rehabilitation is our number

one priority but, however we teach, it's up to them to achieve their ambitions."

After twenty-six years in the service and quality in horticulture, Les has always loved this line of work. "It's all worthwhile when we receive a letter here telling how former inmates are progressing outside."

"All plants are grown from seed in our greenhouses, then planted out as summer and winter bedding. Staff come down here to buy hanging baskets in our spring/summer sale. Christmas planters are popular, as are wicker reindeer and polar bears the prisoners make. Some output also goes to the garden centre shop at HMP Kirkclevington nearby."

Andy adds: "We had the opportunity to showcase what we do to the governor at a staff meeting recently and, from that presentation, 129 Christmas planters have been sold. News like that filters down to our department and is a great incentive for prisoners to excel."

Andy's still moving onwards and upwards on the teaching track by taking his TaQWA course. "Les can teach and assess. Once I have passed the course, I am a qualified assessor and hope to rise to Band 4 if a suitable position becomes available," he explains.

Turfcare at Holme House has to take account of the risk factors inherent in a typical management programme. Andy discusses budget and purchasing with Jeff. "If you put a good case, he usually listens," Andy says. "The Billy Goat vacuum we bought recently is doing a great job of clearing lawns and keeping litter down and our Viking rotaries are perfect for our needs."



“Potentially explosive chemicals and fertilisers have to be strictly controlled, although we apply slow release fertiliser twice in spring and summer then again in November.”

This year’s record-breakingly hot summer posed problems. “With no irrigation, we avoided applying anything to the lawns for nearly two months, and we only ever use a little Roundup for handspraying some areas.”

Edging can be a bugbear in some areas, such as the main throughput for prisoners walking from the house blocks to work placements. “Contractors lay salt in winter to keep the paths and roadways ice free and that kills the grass edges, creating bare borders. I’m aiming to see if we can tackle the problem to help grass grow right up to the tarmac so that presentation is improved.”

Some grassed areas have to remain “plain and simple” to limit the risk of anything being hidden, he adds.

Liquid seaweed poses no problems though. “We apply it when scarifying in autumn - prisoners too: we train and guide them on all the techniques.”

Limited sun on some parts of the site has sparked Andy to

specify a Green Shade seed mix, which he reports is doing well. “It was applied as overseeding under our September-end renovation, along with the slow-release fertiliser to kick start the grass.”

Still cutting well into late autumn, the team keep to a 32mm cut height, “taking the tips off to harden it up.”

Lying on largely clay soil, lawns need plenty of aeration. “They can be prone to some waterlogging in wet weather, but we’ve reduced that with regular slitting,” Andy reports. “Three years ago, you couldn’t walk on the grass it was so soggy.”

The smaller lawns receive light scarifying, another overseeding and application of slow release fertiliser in March ready for summer, cutting down to 28mm in the warmer months, but mindful of the irrigation issue when temperatures soar.

“If thatch builds up in summer, we run the scarifier lightly over and apply the slow-release, taking us through to autumn.”

The Trimax comes into play on large areas around house blocks and other large buildings. “We cut lower at 25mm, as this helps security identify any packages that may



**Our target over the coming years is to improve the look of the grassed areas that lie in front of the house blocks, with soft landscaping to create more stimulating views from the cells**



The Holme House team l-r: Les Gray, Terry Mallerby, Derek Pears, Jeff Wingfield, Colin Steer and Andrew Flanagan

**What's in the shed?**

- Kubota LA854 Tractor
- Viking MB545 rotary roller mowers x 4
- Stihl FS55 strimmer x 2
- Stihl KM130r pole cutter
- Stihl BG86C blower/vacuums x 2
- Toro Hoverpro
- Honda Izy rotary mower
- Honda HRX476 rotary mower
- Honda FG315 rotovator
- Earthway pedestrian spreader
- Billy Goat lawn/litter vacuum
- Husqvarna DT22 scarifier/aerator
- Ransomes Marquis cylinder mower
- Ransomes Matador cylinder mower
- Countax C300h mini tractor with comb, brush and roller attachment
- Artificial pitch maintenance.
- Ferris pedestrian 36in rotary mowers x 4
- Trimax Stealth S2340 mower with rollers
- Ferris Reco flail mower
- Echo tractor-mounted chipper
- Wessex trailer

**Fertiliser and grass seed**

- DLF Masterline Greenshade Mix PM60
- Everris Sportsmaster Renovator Pro 14:0:5+Fe+MCPA+MECOPROP-P
- Applied during lawn renovation period
- ICL autumn/winter fertiliser (4:12:12)
- Novatec Classic slow-release fertiliser 12:8:16+3+TE used throughout the year when applicable to provide a constant flow of nutrients to the rootzone

come over from outside,” Andy adds. “It’s just sound management practice really.”

Walking the site gives you a scale of the task in hand. Acres of grass laid out in a multitude of shapes - long and thin, square or rectangular and others triangular, intersected with pathways.

“Our target over the coming years is to improve the look of the grassed areas that lie in front of the house blocks,” Andy explains, “with soft landscaping to create more stimulating views from the cells.”

A gust of wind suddenly whips up rubbish lying near the blocks. “Litterpicking is like painting the Forth Bridge,” he says, “an ever-present task.”

Tracks across a couple of grassed areas betray the fact that tractors and trailers had passed that way, undertaking lighting maintenance. “I complained about the mess they created and they have agreed to lay mats in future,” Andy states.

Works are in progress on a grass mound by House Block 6. “This’ll be a wildlife pond, complete with aquatic plants. Work’s stopped for the winter now the weather’s changing, but it’ll be another feature for prisoners to enjoy when it’s finished next year.”

The visitor centre overlooks the memorial garden, with its Yin and Yang flowerbeds, whilst beyond, bordered by close-cut Leylandii hedging, young trees sprout, commemorating Holme House’s 20th and 25th anniversaries.

A time capsule, sealed in 2017 and decorated with golden ochre bricks, is due

to be opened in 2042. “We can only guess how things will be then,” Andy remarks.

Ever alert to improving sports provision, in summer Andy prepared part of the grassed area “at very short notice” into a four-lane athletics track for a family sports day. “The stripes marked the lanes,” he explains, “and the improvised facility proved popular with everyone.”

He was also busy on a rectangular patch of grass near a vegetable polytunnel, now bare after the harvest of a bumper crop of tomatoes and chillies.

“We just about managed a bit of a cricket square here,” he adds. “Prisoners could have a knock about and enjoy the fruits of their labours, literally, with a few tomatoes picked straight from the vine.”

Perhaps the most striking feature walking round is the impressively broad striping the prisoners have achieved to create interest and liveliness, even when grass is the only plant present.

The 3G is striped too, summoning up a pleasantly natural presentation. “A comb, brush and light roll gives a great effect,” Andy notes.

After endless unlocking and locking heavy metal gates dividing up the many fenced areas of the grounds - necessary, of course, to maintain site security - Andy’s back at base after our trip ‘round the block’. “I dream about it in my sleep,” he laughs, but the team surely performs the routine many thousands of times a year - as natural a process as breathing.



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# Frank Newberry

Grounds Training Trainer **Frank Newberry** has always been fascinated by the maxim 'never complain, never explain'. This advice is believed, by many, to be the UK Royal Family's strategy for dealing with difficult situations. Frank wonders if we can extend the notion to dealing with the tricky situations we sometimes face, perhaps at work or in life in general



## 'Never Complain, Never Explain'

**T**he phrase was first used by Queen Victoria's favourite Prime Minister - Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881). Disraeli, later Lord Beaconsfield, left us a few good quotes including 'Change is inevitable, change is constant', 'How much easier it is to be critical than to be correct' and 'Courage is fire. Bullying is smoke'.

### When could you use the advice?

Well, perhaps you could use the advice (1) when you have been put 'on the spot' by someone in authority and you need time to think, (2) when you have been caught out by someone behaving differently, or in a way that you did not expect, and now that person needs or is demanding a response from you, or (3) when you have arrived unprepared (through no fault of your own) into a tricky situation at work.

The problem is the 'explaining' part. No one will mind you not complaining. Particularly if, by complaining, you put yourself into the helpless victim category. No one likes to hear that. I suspect that even if people are sympathetic and say that life or work has been unkind or unfair to you - it is perhaps best to brush it off quickly and move on. For more on this subject check out Paul McGee's book '*S.U.M.O. (Shut Up, Move On)*' [ISBN: 9780857086228].

### Just a few words of explanation

If you are put on the spot, or you get some unexpected opposition to your ideas, you will want to explain your case or your position. That is fair, but keep it short. Just a few words of explanation. The more you say in explanation or the longer you take to justify yourself, the more uncertain you will sound. Each word or phrase you use will dilute or diminish the one before it. Just state your position and then shut up. Let silence be your ally. Let the other person, or the other people at the meeting, fill up the silence with their questions. You can then give clear short answers to their questions. If you can handle things this way, you could quickly find yourself in the driving

seat, controlling the discussion.

If you have been caught out by an unexpected request, you may find that, in the face of your stoicism, your questioners will ask if you would like a little time to see what you can manage. People know when they are being unreasonable, but it is not for you to complain, or put them in the wrong. You are a professional - just trying to do a good job.

### Stop friends from making complete fools of themselves

This 'never complain, never explain' maxim can be particularly helpful on social media. Like me, you may have wasted hours of your precious time trying to stop friends from making complete fools of themselves on platforms like Facebook. I have three friends who do this to themselves.

One friend, until recently, was always ranting and raving, making inappropriate personal disclosures about himself and other people. I tackled him, and he really resented my efforts to rein him in. So much so that he started bad mouthing me in his posts - not mentioning me by name but being generally unpleasant about a 'so called friend'. I was that friend and I was merely trying to get him to understand that employers check out social media these days to see what job applicants are really like. He wanted a better job but would not accept that employers check social media as a matter of course these days - as does a barrister I know - when he is preparing a case.

I was hooked though, and things went to a new level when our exchange of views brought a lot of other people into the online debate. People I know (who did not know my identity) and people I did not know. Both categories of people seemed to enjoy defending him by insulting me!

### I was doing too much explaining and complaining

The problem was of my own making. I was doing too much explaining and complaining,

particularly about him being under-employed, and consequently under-paid.

Finally, I took Disraeli's advice. I made one more statement, kept it short and sweet - and consistent - and waited for him to take the bait. After a short wait (during which I maintained a 'radio silence'), he announced online that he had changed tack and would be reining himself in.

He sought me out, gave me a big hug and now we are friends again. By giving him a period of silence, he had the space to change himself - something that I could not do.

I hope you can make this technique work for you. It may feel strange at first. On matters of real importance, you should stick up for yourself; just remember to keep your statements short - and try to never complain, never explain.

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## GOLF

# A New Maintenance Direction?

When discussing the “Future of Golf”, and the environmental, playability and sustainability questions, is it possible the biggest, most important questions have been ignored?

**Most people, and most greenkeepers, try their best. When talking daily golf maintenance, greenkeepers are under enormous time pressure. Virtually most of their tasks are expected to be done before the first golfers arrive.**

This “beat the clock” mentality creates serious conflicts for the greenkeepers as they are often forced to work under less than optimal weather conditions; often wet conditions caused by dew, rain or excessive irrigation. Many don't realise it, but wet soil is ideal for causing damage to the course and produces less than ideal results. Soil compaction, rutting, tears in the grass, lumped grass clippings, poor mowing quality, increased fuel consumption and machine wear and tear are the end results - it is neither productive, efficient, nor the model for sustainability.

All work done under wet conditions is ideal for producing the greenkeeper's devil... compaction... and several thousands of pounds extra annually in order to repair the soil structure damage. It leads to additional work and related disturbances on the golf course. It is difficult to imagine clubs, who clearly understand the problem, would want this. The alternative? Allow greenkeepers the opportunity to deliver first-class work under dry conditions. The club and their members must decide.

Every member would like their annual dues to be spent effectively. If clubs alter their perspective slightly, showing more understanding and allowing greenkeepers to begin some work, like mowing, a few hours later, say 10:00am, in the afternoon or evening - they would provide the flexibility for better results, and help eliminate or reduce the conditions that cause serious problems.

The golfer's desire for green colour is another serious problem to achieving ideal playing conditions. Deep green, lush, dense turf is not ideal at all!

Greens and their surrounds are affected most by soft and green conditions because of the heavy and concentrated traffic produced by both golfers and machines. The result? Greens become uneven, do not guarantee a consistent roll of the ball, suffer quickly from soil compaction and disease.

Green and soft causes problems, problems and more problems, by inviting disease and the wrong types of grasses and plants to thrive. A green and soft golf course is begging to become a series of disease ridden problems. It is neither ecological nor the model of sustainability.

A healthy plant leaf is often light green, yellow, purple or brown! These lean plants have root systems that are deep and healthy. Lush, green grass, by comparison, usually has a weak, shallow root system, the result of too much

nitrogen and water. The plant is lazy, having no need for its root system to seek moisture and nutrients.

If one studies the truly great golf courses, you'll find the turf is lean, the soils firm, dry and fast, not slow, lush and wet. Firm and fast is not cost effective, or more fun to play golf upon. You save on fertilisers, chemicals, fuel, machine and irrigation system repairs, water costs and electricity.

As regulations get tougher, and as chemicals are taken off the market, lush, green and wet has become a club's nightmare.

Nearly all symptoms - especially soil compaction and the resulting grass diseases - are the direct result of applying too much fertiliser and water, and treating the resulting diseased turf with chemicals. New legislation makes it more than tough on golf clubs to continue down this road.

Mechanical soil aeration is one way to ensure grass receives enough oxygen to guarantee healthy turf for sustainable golf. It is crucial for clubs to have a full understanding as to why these time-consuming and expensive soil improving methods are necessary. Avoiding or reducing soil compaction by encouraging dry, firm conditions and mowing under prime conditions is preventive medicine. It helps reduce problems, whilst lowering costs and delivering the finest playing conditions.

To make the most of your budget, of your greenkeeping staff, and creating optimal playing

conditions, it is useful for the club and greenkeeping staff to examine each element of their maintenance practices and seek optimal solutions.

Golf course maintenance is an art combined with science. The fine art of golf course maintenance requires problem areas to be identified and understood by all parties. When challenges are known, solutions can be found.

Understanding can only help create harmony, provide solutions that work with respect and responsibility for Mother Nature, create trust, cooperation and the confidence that the greenkeeper is making the right and best choices.

It's not always easy but, in the long run, it pays off handsomely. Communication is critical, not just at the Board of Directors level with the head greenkeeper, but throughout the club. Those in reception greeting golfers, informal meetings on the golf course, newsletters, club magazines, bulletin boards, blogs, and information pages in the club restaurant are all opportunities to inform, educate and set the foundation for better, more cost-effective maintenance.

A New Maintenance Direction could be a milestone for your golf club, and golf in general.

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# Bohemian Rhapsody?

Waxwings are one of the most stunning winter visitors to the UK. These starling-sized birds, with their colourful plumage, vary in numbers from dozens to thousands depending on their food source. In this article, conservationist **James Common** reveals nine facts you may not have known

**Winter visitor:** Waxwings are winter visitors to Britain, migrating here from their breeding grounds in the boreal forest belt that stretches from Scandinavia, through Russia and across parts of North America. The numbers that reach the UK depend on the availability of berries on the continent. In years where berry-crops fail, birds are forced to migrate greater distances in search of food, often reaching our shores en masse.

**Irruptions:** Given that the winter movements of waxwings are dependent on the amount of food available on the continent, the UK can receive anything from a few dozen birds to as many as 12,000 each year. Most years, Britain hosts at least a few birds; though, during irruption years, many more can arrive on our shores. Eastern and northern Britain tend to receive the highest number of waxwings during the winter due to their proximity to the North Sea crossing points.

**Mountain Ash connoisseurs:** Experts believe Rowan (aka Mountain Ash) to be the favoured food of waxwings; though they regularly feast on other native and non-native Sorbus berries in the UK; among these, hawthorn, cotoneaster and dog rose, with spindle and whitebeam are also taken with gusto. Where berries are in short supply, waxwings can often be drawn to an area with apples, either left as windfall or deliberately placed.

**Feeding habits:** Fruiting plants are incredibly important for waxwings in the winter as they typically eat 800-1000 berries a day, roughly twice their body weight. This changes during the breeding season, however, when the species feeds mainly on midges, mosquitoes and other small insects. It is therefore not unusual to see any waxwings remaining in Britain during the spring feasting on insects.



**Selfless Symbolism:** Spiritualists believe waxwings to be a symbol of selfless generosity. The symbolism of the waxwing totem is believed to teach selflessness and the practice of giving to others for their benefit, and not your own. Waxwings are traditionally associated with the politeness you should have when you give away to others the thing you have craved for or cherished for so long.

**Selfish, not selfless:** It is believed that the association of waxwings with selflessness and giving stems from their courtship habits. When a male waxwing sets out in search of a mate, it often carries a berry - passed to a female bird in an effort to impress her. The female waxwing then takes the berry and returns it to the male, with the gifting ritual repeated many times until, eventually, mating takes place. Whilst some may view this as a sign of selflessness, in reality, the male instigates this ritual in order to spread his own genes; thus the process, whilst touching, is actually rather selfish.

**Waxwing separation:** Two species of waxwing have occurred in Britain: the more common Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) and the much scarcer Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). Separation between the two can often be difficult; though the colour of the bird provides a good indicator. A Bohemian Waxwing has a grey chest and belly, whilst a Cedar Waxwing has a brown chest with a yellow belly. Additionally, if the bird's undertail is a brownish orange, it's a Bohemian Waxwing. If the undertail is white, it's a Cedar Waxwing.

**A rare repeat performance:** Having visited our shores during winter, individual waxwings seldom return to Britain - demonstrated by the incredibly low number of successful ringing recoveries. That said, in 2010, one particular bird bucked this trend, returning to the village of Kintore, in Aberdeenshire, almost a year to the day it had first been ringed by the Grampian Ringing Group. This represented only the third confirmed record of a waxwing returning to the UK in a subsequent winter from over 4,500 ringed birds successfully banded.

**Global Abundance:** Whilst we Brits tend to think of waxwings as a seasonal scarcity, they are actually rather abundant. The global population of waxwings has been estimated at more than three million birds, and the breeding range covers about 12.8 million km<sup>2</sup>. Although this species' population, as of 2013, appears to be declining, the decrease is not rapid nor large enough to trigger a change to their vulnerability criteria. The waxwing is classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as being of 'least concern'.

James Common is a nature writer, conservationist, blogger and birder; holding an MSc in Wildlife Management and working previously in the fields of ecology and practical conservation. He maintains a popular natural history blog at [commonbynature.co.uk](http://commonbynature.co.uk) - which is well worth a read - writes regularly for Northumberland Wildlife Trust and, as its managing director, runs *New Nature* - the youth nature magazine.



Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)



Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) performing the berry passing ritual

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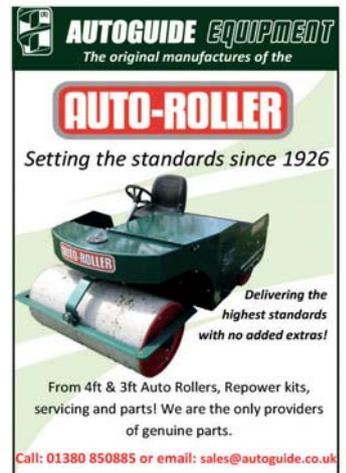
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## AGRONOMY

# Maximising the quality of winter turf surfaces



This winter is likely to be a roller coaster of peaks in growing potential for both grass plant and fungal pathogen alike, followed by dips of activity, first in the plant and then in the fungal pathogen as temperatures fall. Pitchcare Senior Technical Manager, **James Grundy**, investigates

**The forecast for early winter is for fluctuations. Periods of unseasonably mild weather interspersed with cold snaps. Cold spells are predicted to occur throughout January and February once the storage heater effect of the North Sea's residual summer heat has receded such that it can no longer affect a warming effect upon cold easterly air streams moving across the British Isles.**

Looking at the pros and cons of each scenario they can broadly be summed up thus;

#### Warmer Period

**Pros:** If soil temperatures rise above 10°C, then good growth will promote recovery on disease scars and worn areas, as well as push along seeded areas following renovation events during early autumn.

**Cons:** Warmer conditions which promote growth can encourage fungal diseases, especially when they occur alongside high relative humidity and low air movement.



#### Colder Period

**Pros:** Once temperatures drop to zero or below fungal diseases will also draw to a halt.

**Cons:** Grass growth stops once soil temperatures hit low single figures, thus reducing recovery and establishment growth. In addition, cold conditions place an abiotic stress demand on the plant leaf tissues.

Sitting somewhere between warmer and colder are what can be defined as cooler periods where temperatures sit between 5 and 10°C. It is these periods when the grass plants metabolic systems are beginning to grind to a halt but the fungal pathogens systems are still driving onward that surfaces are at high risk of becoming infected with diseases such as *Microdochium nivale*.

Following the withdrawal from use of iprodione in June of this year, and consequently the formulations Chipco Green and Interface, this disease season marks the first year turf managers are faced without a fungicide which will target visibly active *Microdochium nivale* and stop it in its tracks. Instead, the active substances available need to be applied to surfaces before disease is active, non more so than the active substance Fludioxonil.

Fludioxonil is an antisporeulant which acts upon dormant spores on the plant surface and in the rootzone. Fludioxonil interferes with the water pressure in fungal spores causing them to burst and die before prevailing environmental conditions are suitable for promoting their germination. Due to the fact that it does this outside of the plants physical structure Fludioxonil does not have a systemic action which requires plant metabolic function to become effective. Rather Fludioxonil operates outside the plant when it comes into direct contact with dormant fungal spores.

Understanding the basic principle of a relatively straightforward mechanism by which an active substance operates upon a fungal pathogen

(Fludioxonil makes dormant spores burst) allows for greater consideration of effective application timing. For example; given this knowledge, it is clear that an application of Fludioxonil once spores have germinated and then infected a plant, thereby causing visible signs of damage is somewhat akin to bolting the proverbial door once the horse has bolted.

On the flip side, an application of Fludioxonil prior to an outbreak of fungal disease – as the result of reference to historical records and checking of upcoming weather patterns and forecasts which indicate disease is highly likely to occur – would serve to remove dormant spores eagerly lying in wait for conditions to favour them.

Additionally, combining the antisporeulant action of Fludioxonil alongside the plant cell wall strengthening action of foliar calcium would further help to fight off disease by providing the plant itself with the resources it requires to bolster its defences.

Combining these actions, with good old-fashioned principles of aeration ie allow the soil to respire, carry out dew removal to inhibit the fungal pathogens ability to grow and infect across the leaf surface and you have before you the core fundamentals of an Integrated Pest Management Plan for combating fungal diseases on sports turf in December.

One quick word on soil water management; Where surfaces are prone to water logging, then consider the use of a penetrant wetting agent to drive moisture away from the surface. Not only will this reduce surface humidity helping to mitigate pathogen attack, it will also allow the soil to maintain effective respiration which reduces stress on the plant and helps to maintain populations of beneficial microorganisms.

Finally, be sure to investigate areas which were dry in the summer. Do not presume moisture will have yet penetrated at depth, and consider that if not sufficiently rehydrated over the winter, soils will start drier in the spring. Should another dry summer come to pass the onset of water stress will become apparent sooner, again a penetrant wetting agent will help to alleviate this problem.

When looking back at weather records over the past forty-five years, summer 2018 may be considered something of a freak occurrence. However, inspection of weather records over the past five to ten years indicates such extremes are becoming more and more common. The lesson then is not to presume spring and summer 2019 will be any different to 2018; it may very well turn out that way.

As always, prior consideration and then adequate preparation for a range of potential extreme scenarios is paramount to maximising sustained quality of turf surfaces throughout any given year.

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# Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



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Its motor is housed in a magnesium alloy body that guarantees both proper temperature dissipation and total sealing (IP54). The Airion 3 benefits from several improvements over its predecessor: new materials for the air intake elbow and the outlet nozzle, as well as a new cable with high fatigue resistance, which considerably increases the tool's service life.

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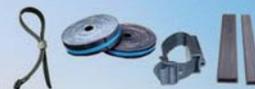
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## Machinery and Supplies

# Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



**The Toro ProStripe® is designed with premier sports venues, municipalities, resorts and golf clubs in mind; combining the benefits of a precise cut and clean striped finish with the simplicity of a walk behind mower.**

The compact lightweight design is ideal for striping smaller areas of turf, easily manoeuvring into tight areas whilst offering added precision, productivity, reliability and durability.

Key features include a two-piece ribbed roller designed to create the perfect finish and crisp stripe, without marking and damaging turf. It has a 3-speed transmission system to adapt to all weather and turf conditions and users can adjust the speed from 2.9 to 5.0 km/h (1.8 to 3.1 mph).

The ProStripe® 560 is also equipped with exclusive MatchCut™ technology, allowing you to quickly and easily fine tune the cutting height with seven half-increment (3.7mm) settings.

The ProStripe® 560 increases productivity through its 80-litre high capacity grass bag and Blade Brake Clutch transmission system. The front fins lift the grass for a clean cut and optimised airflow ensures efficient collection of clippings while directing dust away from the operator.

[www.toro.com](http://www.toro.com)



**The McConnel Robocut range comprises two new models, Robocut RC56 and RC75 with exciting new ground up design which incorporates the very latest advancements in technology.**

Power comes in the form of two new engine choices, 56hp and 75hp, which have been developed in a partnership with Hatz GmbH specifically for working on steep gradients of 55 degrees. New engines provide up to 75% increase in power, resulting in market leading power-to-weight ratio. A new common chassis design provides a lower centre of gravity and perfect 50/50 weight distribution for maximum stability and control in challenging terrain. Fully integrated, dual roll-over protection bars, quick access lifting points and dedicated accessory mounting points also come as standard.

[www.mcconnel.com](http://www.mcconnel.com)



**Powered by a 19hp Yanmar three-cylinder diesel engine, the TYM T194 is the perfect machine for customers who want the compact size and agility of a mower, but with the additional features and practicality of a small tractor.**

TYM have equipped it with features including a powerful dual range HST transmission with fatigue-busting "auto throttle" system which conveniently links the HST pedal to the engine throttle.

The T194 can be equipped with a 54 inch mid mounted deck, with cutting heights from one to four inches. Mowing heights can be adjusted from the operator's seat via the on-board height of cut dial lever which is easy and intuitive to set.

In addition to the mid deck, the T194 can also be specified with a front loader, further enhancing the uses for this small but powerful machine.

[www.reesink.co.uk](http://www.reesink.co.uk)



**The latest Lithium Ion system battery technology in the Allett C34 Evolution drives the future of mowing systems for sports stadiums, training grounds and prestige lawns, without compromise and with all the attributes of the Allett heritage.**

The battery system will power the 86cm mower, without reducing performance, for over six thousand square metres (1.5 acres) per charge and changing batteries takes less than thirty seconds. Whilst the battery drive and chassis design are brand new, the C34 Evolution is fully compatible with Allett's turf maintenance system. There's plenty of power to drive interchangeable cartridges to scarify, rake, aerate, brush and verti-cut and it takes less than one hour to recharge batteries.

Electric power for the professional brings a whole range of benefits. Primarily there's no noise, no emissions at the point of use, less maintenance and easier controls. Couple this with no fuel management and storage requirements, no pull start and a lower lifetime cost of ownership and it's easy to see why the Allett C34 Evolution has its place in groundcare, turf management and sports stadiums; particularly when they are enclosed.

Hand Arm Vibration (HAV) is also much reduced, allowing longer operating times. There is variable speed control and touch button control to give half speed reduction for turning and manoeuvring. Built-in backlapping gives the ability to keep blades sharp for cleaner cutting and quiet operation.

[www.allett.co.uk](http://www.allett.co.uk)



**Allett has created an 86cm/34" solid and dependable stadium rotary mower in the Uplift 86. Twin, 18" contra rotating blades produce a high lift cut and vacuum for increased efficiency, making it the ideal mower for debris collection after matches. The 90 litre grass bag capacity means fewer trips to empty cuttings.**

As you would expect with Allett, the rear roller produces the most perfect stripes. The cutting height is micro adjustable between 1.5 and 7.5cm (0.5in-2.3in) and, amongst the new features, is an HOC front locking kit and lower handle stiffening. The Uplift 86 features a five speed heavy-duty gearbox, with cast aluminium housing and steel gears, which allows the operator to select a comfortable forward speed with greater control in small, intricate areas. Higher speed selection, up to 6.7km/h (4.2mph), quickly covers large areas for increased efficiency.

There is a separate bail bar for the roller drive and blades which allows the operator three modes of selection: roller drive only, blades only or roller drive and blades. The blades are driven by the belt drive and there is a safety blade brake. The handle bars are adjustable for operator comfort.

Reliability and durability are inbuilt, with new chain self tensioning, bearing protection on the toothed pulley and solid front tyres running on bronze bushes, which are greasable for maintenance. A 223cc Briggs & Stratton 950E vertical crankshaft OHV engine featuring 'Ready/Start' drives the Uplift 86. An optional accessory of an Uplift 86B fixed strip brush is also available with soft, medium or hard bristle.

[www.allett.co.uk](http://www.allett.co.uk)

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# OFFSIDE

The not so serious side  
of the industry

## Groundsman suspected of having an affair after receiving texts - from a MowBot

The Etesia lawnmower used by Forest Green Rovers Football Club caused a marital bust-up - when the groundsman's wife suspected him of having an affair.

The organic pitch at the New Lawn is cut by a solar-powered GPS-navigated MowBot



and texts groundsman, Adam Witchell, regularly with updates.

Witchell has revealed that on one occasion he was being inundated with updates throughout the night and his phone started beeping at 2.30am.

"My partner elbowed me aggressively in the midriff and said: 'Who is f\*\*\*ing messaging you at this time?'"

"I said it was the robot. We argued until 6am. Eventually she believed me."

## NHL mascot is an internet sensation

Before 2018, the Philadelphia Flyers ice hockey team had not had a mascot for more than four decades.

Enter Gritty: a seven-foot (slightly terrifying) orange hairy monster that comes complete with a beer-gut, squeaky belly button and wild googly eyes.

Since he was unleashed on the National Hockey League (NHL) stage in September, the mascot has become an internet sensation.



He's amassed almost 200,000 Twitter followers, made appearances on US talk shows, crashed a wedding and is being fought over as an icon for the US political far-left and far-right.

## 'Drunk' curlers kicked out of tournament

An Olympic gold medallist's curling team has been kicked out of the Red Deer Curling Classic tournament for poor



behaviour and drunkenness.

Ryan Fry, who won gold for Canada at the 2014 Winter Olympics, and team mates Jamie Koe, Chris Schille, and DJ Kidby forfeited their final game after fans and opponents complained.

The group reportedly broke brooms and damaged locker rooms.

Mr Fry later apologised for his behaviour.

"They went out to curl and they were extremely drunk and breaking brooms and swearing," Red Deer Curling Centre facility manager Wade Thurber told Canadian broadcaster CBC.

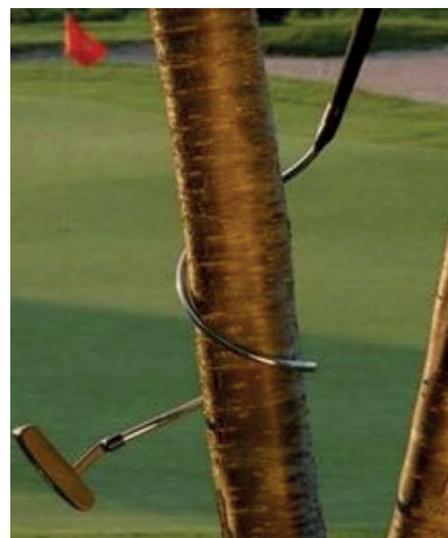
## As seen on social media ...



When lightning strikes



A hole in one?



If you spot anything you think might give readers a chuckle send it to:  
[kerry.haywood@pitchcare.com](mailto:kerry.haywood@pitchcare.com)

# DIARY DATES

JANUARY

**1st:** Happy New Year

**5th-17th:** Football - AFC Asian Cup, UAE, ([www.the-afc.com](http://www.the-afc.com))

**7th (w/c):** Football - EFL Carabao Cup Semi-Finals first leg, venues to be announced ([www.efl.com](http://www.efl.com))

**14th-27th:** Tennis - Australian Open, Melbourne Park ([www.ausopen.com](http://www.ausopen.com))

**20th-23rd:** Industry - BIGGA , Continue to Learn at BTME 2019, Harrogate Convention Centr ([www.bigga.org.uk](http://www.bigga.org.uk))

**22nd-24th:** Industry - BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition 2019, Harrogate Convention Centre ([www.bigga.org.uk](http://www.bigga.org.uk))

**23rd-27th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, First Test. Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**26th-27th:** Rugby - New Zealand Sevens ([www.sevens.co.nz](http://www.sevens.co.nz))

**27th:** American Football - Pro Bowl, Camping World Stadium, Orlando ([www.nfl.com](http://www.nfl.com))

**31st-04/02:** Cricket - West Indies v England, Second Test. Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

FEBRUARY

**2nd:** Rugby - Scotland v Italy, BT Murrayfield ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**2nd:** Rugby - Ireland v England, Aviva Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**3rd:** American Football - Super Bowl LIII, Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta ([www.nfl.com](http://www.nfl.com))

**9th-13th:** Cricket - Third Test. England v West Indies, Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, St Lucia ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**9th:** Rugby - Scotland v Ireland, BT Murrayfield ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**9th:** Rugby - Italy v Wales, Stadio Olimpico ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**9th-17th March:** Rugby - European Nations Cup ([www.rugbyeurope.eu](http://www.rugbyeurope.eu))

**10th:** Rugby - England v France, Twickenham Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**14th:** Don't forget Valentines Day

**20th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 1st ODI, Kensington Oval, Barbados ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**22nd:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 2nd ODI, Kensington Oval, Barbados ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**23rd:** Rugby - France v Scotland, Stade de France ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**23rd:** Rugby - Wales v England, Principality Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**24th:** Football - Carabou Cup Final, Wembley Stadium ([www.efl.com](http://www.efl.com))

**24th:** Rugby - Italy v Ireland, Stadio Olimpico ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**25th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 3rd ODI, National Cricket Stadium, Grenada ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**27th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 4th ODI, National Cricket Stadium, Grenada ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

MARCH

**2nd:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 5th ODI, Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, St Lucia ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**4th-17th:** Tennis - BNP Paribas Open, Indian Wells Tennis Garden ([www.bnpparibasopen.com](http://www.bnpparibasopen.com))

**5th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 1st International Twenty20, Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, St Lucia ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**8th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 2nd International Twenty20, Warner Park, St Kitts ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**9th:** Rugby - Scotland v Wales, BT Murrayfield ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**9th:** Rugby - England v Italy, Twickenham Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**10th:** Cricket - West Indies v England, 3rd International Twenty20, Warner Park, St Kitts ([www.ecb.com](http://www.ecb.com))

**12th-15th:** Horseracing - Cheltenham Festival, Cheltenham Racecourse ([www.cheltenham.thejockeyclub.co.uk](http://www.cheltenham.thejockeyclub.co.uk))

**16th:** Rugby - Wales v Ireland, Principality Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**16th:** Rugby - England v Scotland, Twickenham Stadium ([www.sixnationsrugby.com](http://www.sixnationsrugby.com))

**23rd onwards:** Cricket - Vivo Indian Premier League ([www.iplt20.com](http://www.iplt20.com))

**31st:** Football - Check-a-Trade Cup Final, Wembley Stadium ([www.efl.com](http://www.efl.com))

To have your event included in this magazine diary section, please email details to [kerry@pitchcare.com](mailto:kerry@pitchcare.com)

## QUOTE ME HAPPY

"That's like trying to catch a satsuma thrown out of a passing car window." **The BBC's Tom Rostance describes a 'difficult' catch during England's 1st Test against Sri Lanka.**

"We are back in the race after eleven games." **Huddersfield boss David Wagner after his team's first win of the season. I wonder what race he was referring to?**

"The fun thing is I still feel like there's improvement to be had and that's what I'm looking for." **World number one golfer Justin Rose reckons he can better after winning the Turkish Open - his fifth win in thirty-one tournaments. He was top-ten in lots of the others!**

"Smile with us, dream with us". **Cricket Australia's new cringeworthy slogan in the wake of the ball tampering affair.**



Maria Sharapova

"What's challenging is when you're a teenager and you have a few hundred dollars and you've got no sense of the future. You don't know where you're going to end up. You just have a dream. That's a lot tougher than being 31 years old and having the opportunity to do whatever I want in my life." **Maria Sharapova puts a last sixteen loss into perspective.**

"If there is a small one, there is usually a large one nearby and the groundstaff here have had 'snake watch' added to their list of responsibilities." **England cricket coach Trevor Bayliss talks a load of cobras during the second Test against Sri Lanka in Pallekele.**

"The Super League will not happen. It is in a way a fiction now or a dream." **UEFA president Aleksander Ceferindenes categorically denies that a new elite European football league is in the advanced planning stage. We await news of the start date!**

"Woakesy and I just said: 'Well, if he's not moving it then we'd have been useless on this, wouldn't we?'" - **Paceman Stuart Broad watched Jimmy Anderson's toiling efforts from the side-lines in Sri Lanka. 18 of the home side's wickets fell to spin!**

It's about obsessing over the little things, the details no one else sees. It's never tolerating anything less than the best. Perfection is a mindset. And that's worth being proud of.

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