

**Cricket Ground Maintenance
Seasonal Guidance
Issued: December 2020**

Grassroots playing facilities will again currently have many questions about the current and potential restrictions the Government may impose to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus with regards to cricket surfaces, their ongoing maintenance and what works may be carried out to provide a fit for play surface or keep a surface ticking over.

Please ensure you always follow government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) if you work either as lone workers or as part of a team.

Cricket playing surfaces may be maintained by the following category of people:

Professional managers and staff are advised to continue to actively consult and discuss working practices with their employers.

Self-employed grounds staff or contractors are advised to follow the latest Government guidelines, formulate an agreed plan that includes your safe working procedure, and clearly communicate with clients in advance and agree safe working procedures.

Volunteers should follow latest Government guidelines and not put themselves or others at risk.

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This document sets out basic guidance – for the coming months.

On Your Square

The main message to cricket ground staff/volunteers is to ideally continue with all, or most, of the typical good maintenance practices but at a reduced intensity to meet the needs of your particular surface.

An ongoing dialogue with your club and leagues will be necessary to ensure sufficient lead in time to get the surface safe and ready for the following season.

During winter months

The occasional surveillance of the square will provide the opportunity of investigating any outbreak of fungal disease, and also enable the detection of any excessive grass growth. Do not roll the square until February/March, in preparation for the start of the new season.

During mild spells it may be necessary to top the grass to ensure that the sward growth is not weakened in the spring by removing too much growth in a short period of time. Any growth over 25mm should be lowered to 20-22mm when ground conditions allow mowers to be used and foot-traffic to be carried – do not cut when there is a risk of damage to surface levels.

Walk the square to remove any debris or rubbish which may have accumulated to ensure that no damage will be caused to the mower.

Further work will include aeration during the winter months with regular inspection and brushing/drag matting when ground conditions allow, to minimise the opportunity of any disease developing and ensure the dispersal of worm casts if present. Note that this is more effective in dry conditions – attempting to remove clay-soil wormcasts when too wet can lead to ‘smears’ where grass content will be lowered.

Aeration

- Improves water uptake and helps to get water deep in the profile.
- Encourages exchange of oxygen with more plant-toxic gasses in the deeper soil profile such as carbon dioxide.
- Improves nutrient uptake.
- Reduces water runoff and puddling.
- Encourages stronger roots.
- Can help to reduce organic matter (including thatch) accumulation by encouraging soil microbial activity.
- Aerate once a month if conditions are fit until early February
- If you can, aerate once, ideally before the new year. Make sure that ‘heave’ is minimised and try to get as deep as possible without damaging the surface, or ‘plucking’. Try and achieve the maximum depth with needle or pencil tines as ground conditions allow. You should vary depth season-to-season to avoid forming a compaction pan.

Brushing

This is to help the surface remain dry and reduce disease pressure, keeping the sward healthy.

- Remove dew to help prevent disease
- Reduces debris on the surface
- Stands the grass plant up to keep the base of the plant well oxygenated
- Can help to reduce algae and moss formation
- Disperse worm casts

Fertiliser programme

This is essential to ensure that the grass plant remains healthy and strong for the following season

Fertiliser may be applied to maintain the health of the grass and appearance of the cricket ground. It is best to apply fertiliser when the immediate surface is free from damp but there is still some moisture in the soil.

Avoid dry, frosty, or windy conditions - as these often result in uneven distribution and possible scorching.

Always check the calibration of the machine before fertiliser applications to ensure that the spread rate is correct, follow manufacturer’s instructions.

- This provides one or more essential plant nutrients to aid growth and health and can be applied to the turf surface or rootzone.

- A low nitrogen, low phosphorus but higher in potassium is a typical fertiliser used during the winter months – this helps to prevent diseases forming in lush, damp cold grass that is difficult to cut. The potassium helps to strengthen the structure of the plant, this can be helped further with the addition of iron, which when applied as iron-sulphate can also help to control moss growth. Often such fertilisers are marketed as 'Winter Feed' or similar. If you are in any doubt – speak to your fertiliser supplier. Always follow the label recommendations, particularly on application rate.
- Always follow the label recommendations, particularly on application rate. Remember it is about the amount of fertiliser you put on, as much as the nutrient quantities (percentages) of the fertiliser. Two bags of 5:5:10 will put on the same amount of nitrogen and other nutrients as one bag of 10:10:20 over the same area. Also make sure that you are applying it evenly. A quick calculation to work out your area is:

Number of Pitches x Width of a Pitch x Length of the Square

- If you struggle with uniformity of application in a single pass you can apply your fertiliser in two doses at half target rate, at 90 degrees to each other – that way you often reach full target rate more evenly.

Getting Your Outfield Ready

The outfield should ideally be kept as freely draining as possible. Aim to maintain suitable grasses, with weed content below 10% and thatch layer no more than 5mm. It must be cleared of any objects that could cause injury to players or damage to machinery. If grass clippings are removed then a fertiliser programme will need to be in place

Winter months

- Maintain a grass height of 20-25 mm if the area is a cricket outfield only and above 30mm if used for winter sport.
- Aeration using solid or slit tines
- Brush if possible
- Remove leaves from turfgrass areas
- Removing leaves and boxing off clippings will help to reduce the worm population.
- The effects of casting worms should be dealt with prior to mowing using either products sold for this purpose and/or via use of a drag mat to disperse casts.

For joint winter sports and cricket sites there are some common maintenance issues such as compaction of soil, uneven surfaces, and bare patches. To address these types of problems some key considerations are:

- Regular quality mowing with well-maintained machinery.
- Weed control to ensure only desirable grasses are present in the sward.
- Moss should be controlled before it becomes a problem. Moss is the symptom of poor growing conditions, not the cause of them, so good cultural practices will help to keep moss out of the sward. If moss does appear then application of iron sulphate will help to control it.
- The use of approved marking materials; users can be injured by the use of inappropriate materials. The use of these inappropriate materials is often illegal.
- Pitch rotation where possible to allow high wear areas time to repair.

Start to plan/discuss with the club for a full renovation to be carried out across the winter sport pitches on cricket outfield when the winter sport season is finished.

- Weed control to ensure only desirable grasses are present in the sward.
- Deep tine aeration
- Overseeding with a desired ryegrass sports seed mix
- Top dressing with a minimum of 60 tons using a suitable sports sand dressing. An 80/20, 70/30 sports rootzone mix can be used within the goal mouth areas for added binding strength
- Also, as part of the renovation it will be important to eradicate any unwanted thatch layer through scarification to the appropriate depth

Pre-season

- Have a walk over the outfield, fix any holes or damage, making the ground safe. Make sure that ground equipment such as sight screens and covers are repaired where required and set up for the season.
- Ensure all maintenance equipment has been serviced and is ready for the coming season.
- De-compact the outfield (Deep tine or linear)
- Adjust mowing heights – if the outfield is not used for winter sports then 20-23 mm can be maintained but this might need to be increased to 25-35 mm for sustainable wear resistance in football or rugby pitches.

Remember!

Only carry out if ground and climate conditions are suitable

If the ground is too wet, thawing or frozen you will create more problems by going on it.

Please always ensure you adhere to up-to-date government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) regarding the current situation.