

GROUNDS MANAGEMENT



GROUNDS
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION

Making sport possible

February 2021 | £4.00

SECTOR SUPPORT

Perennial helpline offers advice 24/7

APPRENTICESHIPS

An update on current education options

ONLINE LEARNING

GMA launches Level 3 Winter Pitches

CHINA'S GOAL

Dalian Football Youth Training Centre



BOUNCE BACK

The FA's national strategy
for grassroots football
post Covid-19



FEBRUARY 2021

WELCOME

A year unparalleled

A year into the Covid-19 pandemic, we reflect on 12 months of upheaval, where many of us have had to deal with extraordinary stress that continues to affect our personal and professional lives.

Job uncertainty, money worries and health concerns can have a devastating impact on mental health. However, the resilience, adaptability, innovation and dedication of many business owners and employees in the grounds care sector has helped to navigate a way through this past year, and as we emerge from the grip of this pandemic it's vital that we continue to support each other.

In this issue, we highlight the services offered to grounds care professionals by horticulture charity Perennial which, in the first lockdown, witnessed a 400 per cent increase in calls to its helpline. It is important to know that our members can access this useful support. See page 14 for more details.

The GMA has not been immune to the impact of the pandemic. We moved SALTEX 2020 to November 2021 – the first cancellation since the Second World War, and we paused our annual Industry Awards – opting for a 'Hall of Fame' recognition in 2020. However, we have adapted our services to suit current needs by delivering online Level 1, 2 and 3 Winter Pitches courses, hosted informative webinars, established and updated Covid-19 pitch maintenance guidance and will host the first #GroundsWeek celebration from 1-7 March. So help us by joining this initiative to raise the profile and importance of groundsmanship as we help to reactivate the nation.

Geoff Webb
Chief Executive
Grounds Management Association



Next
issue of
**GROUNDS
MANAGEMENT**
out from
March 1



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UPDATE

THE LATEST HEADLINES FROM GMA AND THE INDUSTRY

GET ACTIVE

Sports and physical activity to be at the heart of nation's recovery

HELPING GRASSROOTS SPORT and physical activity recover from the social and economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic and investing time and resources into tackling the key challenges of the next decade are the cornerstones of Sport England's new long-term strategy.

The strategy, called Uniting the Movement, runs through to 2031 but is most immediately focused on helping the people and organisations who deliver grassroots sport and physical activity to cope with the pressures brought by the pandemic.

An additional £50m is being made available specifically to support this network in 2021, adding to the £220m Sport England has already invested through National Lottery and Exchequer funding since last March, to help the sector and ecosystem it supports.

Further work will be done to understand where to best target this additional investment to ensure that as many clubs, organisations and people are helped, but a particular emphasis will be placed on supporting children and young people to get back involved in sport and activities with confidence.

The strategy also identifies the longer-term challenges of the next



decade, which were important before coronavirus, but are now crucial. It seeks to tackle the long-standing inequalities that have existed within the sport sector and have been reinforced by the recent disruption. Nick Bitel, Sport England chair said: "Sport England is determined that we will unlock the advantages of sport and physical activity and truly make it a normal part of life for everyone in England, no matter what their background. It recognises the enormous challenges of the past year but seeks to make certain that we do everything possible to ensure that investment and resources reach the people and organisations who need it most so together we can change lives for the better right across the country."

NEWS IN BRIEF

#GroundsWeek plans continue

The GMA's first ever #GroundsWeek (1 – 7 March) is making ground and, with less than a month to go, an online toolkit is now available for GMA members. This includes suggested social media posts, graphics and details why the GMA is launching a national celebration of the turf care sector.

Visit thegma.org.uk/groundsweek to find out more. If you're interested in sponsoring #GroundsWeek, please contact lperry@thegma.org.uk

GreenMech appoints Frank Alviti dealer

The strategic re-alignment of the GreenMech dealer network continues with the announcement that Frank Alviti will be taking over the areas of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Mid-Wales.

With a well-established client base that spans arboriculture, groundcare and industrial, Frank Alviti will be offering sales and support across the complete GreenMech range from their Ludlow premises.

Yorkshire Branch update

GMA Yorkshire Branch events are currently on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions. This will be reviewed going forward based on the latest government guidelines. The branch is looking to plan events for spring/summer 2021, if guidance allows. To register your interest for member events in the Yorkshire area please contact membership@thegma.org.uk

FUNDING

Grants for football clubs

STEPS 3-6 OF the National League system will receive up to £10m to protect the immediate future of approximately 850 clubs over the winter, it has been announced.

The funding will be in the form of grants, and eligible clubs will be contacted by the Football Foundation with details of how to apply.

Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston said: "We promised to support sports and target help to where it's most needed. We continue to deliver on that with further support for National League football clubs.

"The National League has already benefited from the Government support and there will be more

support for the bigger clubs on the way.

"This £10m grant for lower league clubs in Steps 3-6 will act as a lifeline for around 850 clubs in towns and cities across England and help these clubs through this difficult period until we can get fans back in safely."



A GRASSROOTS GAME-CHANGING ROADMAP

Rory Carroll
Football Foundation
head of communications



The Football Foundation's Rory Carroll outlines the FA's new blueprint for football's infrastructure across England and how it could help the sport, and the health of the nation, bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic



ENGLISH FOOTBALL'S COLLECTIVE plan to deliver a grassroots infrastructure includes 318 bespoke Local Football Facility Plans (LFFP) that have been created for every local authority across England. They comprise an agreed list of specific pitches and clubhouses to build or improve in their area. Collectively these plans form a national roadmap for transforming the landscape of this country's grassroots game.

Strategic planning

The plans are the culmination of two years' work and consultation with communities. We spoke to over 2,000 local clubs, more than 300 local authorities, the County FAs and a range of other stakeholders, including the GMA. We jointly identified a pipeline of projects that had the greatest need that will achieve the greatest impact and have captured them in each plan.

Since 2000, the Football Foundation has funded £1.5bn-worth of grassroots projects. These new plans identify more than 5,000 individual facility projects, including grass pitches, artificial pitches, pavilions and small-sided multi-use games areas.

These projects are not just important for the health of our national game. They will also support the health of our population and our economy.

Participation in football transforms lives by improving physical and mental health, empowering young people and strengthening communities. Delivering these plans across England will also be a vital component in helping us bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic as a fit and healthy nation.

What's next?

This blueprint is just the start. The scale of the grassroots facilities challenge is still sizeable. The next challenge therefore is to work together – as a team at the local and national level – to secure the necessary funding and deliver these projects.

The current financial backdrop poses an additional challenge. Local authorities are having to make difficult decisions about short-term needs created by Covid-19, while still delivering against their longer-term strategies. However, investing in local community football facilities can help by delivering valuable health, social and economic outcomes.

The GMA's role

GMA regional pitch advisors have, and will, continue to provide an active role working alongside County FAs and the Football Foundation to provide technical expertise and input on Grass Pitch Improvement Projects as part of the Local Football Facility Plans.

There are encouraging signs that local authorities are increasingly integrating physical activity into more proactive public health policies. Local health and well-being strategies across England consistently highlight physical inactivity as a major challenge. Investing in improving the capacity and the quality of local football facilities and increasing participation is an effective way to tackle this.

Sunderland City Council, for example, have explained that they have seen huge increases in football participation at their new hub sites in the city, which have proved invaluable in supporting the area's health and resilience during the pandemic.

Nationally, the Football Foundation, the Premier League, The FA, the government and Sport England have committed funds to help deliver these ambitious plans. We are ready to work with local authorities and local communities, as a team, to make them a reality.

England manager and Football Foundation ambassador Gareth Southgate also expressed his excitement about the potential of these plans, adding a rallying cry: "What we've now got to do is work together to provide these facilities that have never been more important. I'm looking forward to playing my part. I hope that you will as well." ■



Find out more about The FA's long-term vision for a new generation of community football facilities across England and read any of the 318 Local Football Facility Plans at footballfoundation.org.uk

APPRENTICESHIPS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Apprenticeships are becoming popular within the turf care sector - among employers as well as anyone who is looking to 'learn and earn' within their working environment. We talk to two apprentices and offer an update on the education options that are available

Karen Maxwell
Editor



APPRENTICESHIPS in the turf care industry are a viable option as a route into the sector –for people looking for a first job, or career change, that suits their interests in sport, horticulture and working in an outdoor environment.

In 2014, the GMA helped to facilitate the original Trailblazer employer group to assist in the development of the Level 2 Sports Turf Operative Apprenticeship Standard. The group has now evolved and the new independent Trailblazer employer group, chaired by Daniel Ratling, head of grounds at Whitgift School, has been developing a new Level 3 sports-turf standard, which is supported by the GMA.



Dalian Youth Football Centre in China was designed and built to world-leading standards

DALIAN BASE FOR CHINA'S BIGGEST FOOTBALL TRAINING CENTRE

Dalian Football Youth Training Centre, designed with world-leading standards, is the biggest training centre in China. It is open to all demographic groups, all year round, 24 hours a day and reflects the country's increasing love of the sport – and its plans to excel

Darra Hudner
Sportsturf consultant
STRI



DALIAN IS CHINA'S most famous football city. It has produced many talented footballers and currently 70 players from the city are playing in China Super League. Based in North East China, its strong footballing pedigree stretches back to 1955 when shipyard workers began building Dalian Pro Football Club, the current Chinese Super League team's home ground. The club's first major silverware was the 1992 Chinese FA Cup, the most recent advancement was the Dalian team being acquired by Wanda Group and the acquisition of Rafa Benitez (and his team) as Senior Men's football manager. However, the crowning glory of Wanda's plans to future proof Dalian's football history was the announcement of the proposed Dalian Football Youth Training Centre.

Football Facilities

The scale and ambition of this project was second to none. A 22-hectare site in an industrial sector of the city, approximately an hour's drive from the city centre, was to

be turned into the first world-class 23-pitch football academy in China and included:

- Two full-size heated FIFA Pro indoor pitches
- A 5,000-seater stadium pitch – complete with a hybrid reinforced surface and an under-soil heating system
- 10 full-size FIFA-standard mixed cool season natural turf pitches (Perennial Ryegrass and Kentucky Bluegrass) with and without reinforcement
- A full-size outdoor FIFA Pro pitch plus small sided pitches and training areas.
- Accommodation, teaching, rehabilitation and conference facilities
- Capacity to hold 18 teams or 600 players at one time and allow access to local schools and the local community.

The real clincher of this project was not just the sheer scale of it but the construction time scale. The project began in April 2019 and was scheduled to open in December 2019.

Turf advice beyond the mainland

A grounds and turf natural improvement programme has benefited football clubs on the Isle of Man



Adam Cooper
Regional pitch
advisor (North
West)

MANY READERS MAY not be aware that the Isle of Man has a thriving football community set up with a dedicated Island FA headed by Lewis Qualtrough. With over 20 clubs playing regular matches, the island has a close-knit group of grounds people who do a fantastic job keeping their facilities to a good standard, often with limited resources. Sadly though, the clubs' finances have been hit hard this season with the cancellation of the TT Races in 2020 and also in 2021 – an annual event where a large number of the clubs would normally benefit from letting their facilities as campsites.

However, the opening of the Football Foundation's Enhanced Pitch Maintenance Fund early in 2020 has assisted the clubs, allowing them to continue through this difficult time.

The clubs and their extremely dedicated support pitch advisor Mike Atherton, who has supported them throughout, have made great use of the Grass Pitch Improvement Programme and 17 clubs have secured financial support from the Enhanced Pitch Maintenance fund – along with several others that have also received new



The pitch at Marown FC was almost entirely under water

machinery. Mike's support has allowed the clubs to make good use of every penny of the allocation. When the recent Pitch Power submissions were made by the clubs as part of the GMA's monitoring process, all achieved the 'good' or 'advanced' standard.

Marown FC is just one of the clubs to benefit from the programme as groundsman Andy Cain explains: "In 2016, Marown Football Club was awarded a Grass Pitch Improvement Programme grant from the Football Foundation, which enabled us to take the football pitch to its current level. Using the funds, we purchased a new tractor, a Quadraplay and a Multitiner.

"The first couple of years were a concern as the pitch was so wet in the autumn, due to the extremely high levels of rainfall, which limited the opportunities to deploy the new machinery. Also, with the added complexity of sharing the field, with the local cricket club, and no resting time for the ground, there was no real opportunity for work to be completed out of the football season.

"We are proud of the current condition of the pitch however, which is the result of perseverance and the invaluable help of our pitch advisor, Mike Atherton. We can now see the improvement in the pitch quality, which has moved to the next level for the players and the club," Andy says. ■



The pitch at Marown FC after the improvements



March Operations

Our monthly maintenance guide to help you keep your sports surfaces in top condition all year round

BOWLING GREEN

- Brush to remove morning dew and inspect for any signs of disease.
- Aerate with slit tines when ground conditions allow, although greenkeepers may use solid tines to prevent slits opening later in the season.
- Light roll to smooth the surface - but take a soil sample to check the moisture before commencing.
- Some greens may be ready for a light topdressing at the end of March - be careful not to smother the grass and work dressing in well.
- Check and test the irrigation system.

TENNIS

- Brush to remove morning dew and inspect for any signs of disease.
- Aerate using solid tines if conditions allow.
- Begin light rolling the courts if ground conditions are suitable.
- Make repairs by overseeding and lightly dress any low areas or patches of poor coverage.
- A 'false spring' may require frequent topping of the grass but don't lower the height of cut too early or overfeed.

CRICKET SQUARE

- Brush to remove morning dew and inspect for any signs of disease.
- Repair areas which may have sparse

coverage or isolated low levels.

- Rolling and consolidation of the cricket square should be the priority this month, begin rolling when conditions allow with a light roller. By the end of the month if conditions allow, gradually move up to a medium-weight roller or increase ballast.
- Gradually reduce the height of cut but be aware of any potential change in the weather.
- A light verti-cut may be possible if growth is reasonable, but don't overdo it.
- Ensure the square is correctly set out with the corners being at exact right angles and pitches correctly marked and numbered.

CRICKET OUTFIELD

- Aerate if ground conditions allow and return to a suitable mowing height and frequency.
- Check for small undulations or worn areas - especially in the bowlers' run-up and make repairs by spiking, seeding and lightly topdressing.

SYNTHETIC CRICKET PITCHES

- Aggregate-based pitches expand during the winter as they soak in moisture, releasing compaction. This needs to be addressed pre-season to ensure pitches continue to play well. During March and April roll with a light roller to recompact and squeeze moisture out. If not carried

out, more moisture will be absorbed in subsequent years and the base will rapidly deteriorate.

- Pitches without shockpads should have the surface fully removed and the aggregate levelled by raking and luting as the base can be damaged by ball impacts from the previous season, then recompact directly before reinstating the surface.
- Annual care and attention may save the cost of having to employ specialists to rectify a major problem in the future.

RACECOURSE

- Re-commission the irrigation system.
- Prepare for the start of the flat racing season by increasing the mowing frequency.
- Don't set the height of cut too low otherwise a cold spring will slow any grass regrowth.
- Aerate if conditions allow.

WINTER SPORTS PITCHES

(football, rugby league and union)

- Remove surface debris to help maintain a healthy grass surface and prevent damage to any equipment, machinery or players.
- Continue to present the surface by cutting, if required, or drag brushing when ground conditions allow. On wet/frozen ground if you leave a footprint – don't continue.
- Light sand dressings, seeding and spiking in thin and bare areas will help to maintain and restore surface quality.
- Aerate the pitch when ground conditions allow - it could cause more harm than good if soil conditions are unsuitable.
- You may need to adjust cutting frequency to match the spring flush of growth.
- Begin to think about your end of season renovation plans.
- Divoting remains one of the most important tasks – perform repairs to the surface as soon as possible following play and try to stand up as much grass as possible.
- If the weather conditions are favorable, then lightly overseed the pitch towards the end of the month and consider spring/summer feed once stable conditions appear. ■

For more information on key maintenance tasks for volunteers, visit resources.thegma.org.uk



There is plenty to do this month to ensure that your grounds are in peak condition

PRODUCT SHOWCASE

AERATION

PRICE TURFCARE

Banish compaction with Ventrac

The AERA-vator attachment on the Ventrac 4500 all-terrain compact tractor is designed to vibrate and loosen the soil beneath the grass without destroying the turf. It creates a hole without bringing a core to the surface, leaving the turf ready for use immediately following aeration.

With a working width of 1.52m and a depth of 7mm, the vibrating heads create six holes every 300mm (66 holes per square metre) with the hole size regulated by the drive speed. The slower the forward speed, the larger

the hole. The AERA-vator is built with the Ventrac Mount System, allowing quick and easy attachment changes, and comes with a standard jack stand for storing. An optional overseeding kit is available.

With the Ventrac all-terrain compact tractor there is now a machine that can be used for a multitude of grounds care operations. With over 30 attachments, the Ventrac provides year-round solutions for the turf manager.

priceturfcare.com



REDEXIM

In wet conditions, consider linear aeration with Redexim Verti-Quake



If a wet spring is on the cards, Redexim suggest that linear aeration with the Verti-Quake range of machines could be considered a more favourable tool over traditional methods of reducing surface

compaction. The unique 'wave' action of the Verti-Quake shatters soil laterally, for maximum effectiveness and minimum surface disruption.

The Verti-Quake range is available in a variety of working widths from 1.1m up to 2.5m with the Verti-Quake 3825, offering a maximum working depth of 380mm (15"). Decomposition of the soil takes place through the rotary motion of offset blades which, combined with the forward speed, make a wave action. This creates the desired fracturing and fissuring in the profile, establishing the all-important channels for downward movement of water and nutrients and vital space for root formation. It is particularly effective when used in conjunction with conventional verti-draining, linking networks up with the deeper aeration work conducted in the previous season.

By conducting the majority of the work under the surface, the Verti-Quake creates almost zero surface disruption, bringing turf back into play quicker. However, it should be used with caution in drier conditions as slit lines can shrink and open up if the ground is too dry.

charterhouse-tm.co.uk

GKB MACHINES

GKB offer grounds personnel the ultimate aeration machinery



GKB Machines provide grounds personnel with the solution to ground compaction thanks to their aeration products. Combining aeration and rolling, the GKB Deep Tine Aerator (DTA) and GKB Topair work together to ensure that grounds can be

maintained to optimum condition.

With many turf professionals stuck between wanting their grass to grow and also wanting to maintain a levelled sports pitch, the GKB Topair offers the perfect solution. Thanks to its Evolvente blades, the GKB Topair minimises the surface disruption, and also reduces power usage by minimising friction between the blades and the pitch.

The robust GKB Topair also allows users to level out their sports pitch by a hydraulically adjustable pressure roller, which can be used to aerate and level the pitch or execute the tasks separately.

Considered one of the major causes of poor sward density, root development and waterlogging, the GKB Deep Tine Aerator (DTA) works on natural sports pitches to relieve the surface compaction enabling water to travel through and allow stronger roots to develop.

gkbmachines.com



GMA LAUNCHES NEW ONLINE LEVEL 3 WINTER PITCHES COURSE

The latest addition to the GMA online training portfolio covers all aspects of managing pitches through the cold season



Miri Buac
Head of
communications
at the GMA

THE GMA HAS launched the latest addition to its online training portfolio with its new Level 3 – Winter Pitches ‘Advanced Turf Culture’ course for experienced volunteers and professionals.

This online course will help participants understand the advanced technical aspects of turf maintenance and how they form an integral part of a detailed maintenance programme. The course will also support participants in getting the most from their playing surfaces in terms of quality standards and carrying capacity.

Upon successful completion, participants will have improved their knowledge of winter pitch management by completing modules that cover soil nutrient testing, grass cultivars and evaluation, control of threats to turf health, health and safety, plus the influence of drainage, soil type and compaction - all of which impact on the carrying capacity of sport turf pitches. In addition, the course addresses key skills, such as planning winter maintenance programmes and managing surfaces, in order to optimise carrying capacity.

The Level 3 course takes approximately six hours to complete and consists of seven informative lessons with content produced by the GMA’s specialist technical and learning team. The course costs £150 for non-members and £110 for GMA members (reflecting a 30 per cent discount).

Jason Booth, GMA chief operations officer, said: “Our online learning has been a huge success and we’re really pleased to be launching this

course not long after reaching the milestone of 1,000 sign-ups since we first launched online training in May 2020.

“We’re determined to ensure that grounds staff, at all levels, have the opportunity to learn and develop their skills, despite the challenges that national restrictions and lockdowns create. With high rainfall and snow ahead of us, launching the Level 3 course now was the clear ‘next step’ to our online offerings.

“Following on from our Level 1 and Level 2 online training courses that cover the basics of grounds maintenance and management, we believe that those who already have some experience also have the opportunity to improve. The new course also offers inexperienced grounds staff the chance to expand their skills and capabilities through online modules that support their development,” Jason concludes.

The GMA will continue to develop and introduce new online training courses for a range of sports as the seasons and weather change throughout the year. ■



To upskill your knowledge or for more information on training courses and bespoke training sessions, visit www.thegma.org.uk/learning or email learning@thegma.org.uk

Labour-saving TinyLineMarker gains top marks at Oakgrove School

With 'innovation' at the heart of Oakgrove School's motto, the school has invested in its very own robot – Rigby Taylor's TinyLineMarker Sport – to help realise it's ambition to create some of the best pitches in Milton Keynes

When Oakgrove School decided on a plan to improve its playing surfaces and hire out more of its pitches to the Milton Keynes' community, headteacher Ian Tett, who worked for the National Trust before becoming a teacher, (together with the school's governing body), embarked on a pitch improvement programme by replacing the school's contractor services with the in-house expertise of grounds maintenance manager and horticulturist Bill Malins.

The school is now 18 months into Bill's three-year renovation programme, which covers the site's five natural turf pitches and landscaped areas, and already pitch standards have dramatically changed for the better.

Bill has sole responsibility for grounds maintenance at the school and says some of the pitch issues were due to the fact they were the original playing surfaces installed when the school opened in 2005.

Working on a tight budget throughout the renovation period, Bill has hired equipment, as required, from Browns in Leighton Buzzard. This includes a Kubota L2602 and a STW40 tractor (for pulling a Trimax Snake 3.2 triple deck mower and spreading top dressing), a Gradient Scarifier, a Vertiquake Shockwave, a Charterhouse 1.5m overseeder and a 1.5m Vertidrain. He used contractors to spray the weeds, feed the grass and mark the

pitch and when these were decompacted and aerated playing standards improved remarkably.

The inevitable increase in pitch demand by students and the local community – including 15 Milton Keynes' City Colts football teams – encouraged Bill to look for a faster, more cost-effective alternative to the school's contracted fortnightly line-marking services to enable to school to provide pitch use flexibility. "I came across the TinyLineMarker on the Rigby Taylor stand at SALTEX and thought I have to have one of those," Bill says.

An on-site demonstration was organised by Rigby Taylor technical sales manager Simon Hughes and Bill got the chance to see the robot in action. Bill placed the order and when Simon returned to the school to install the TinyLineMarker Sport he helped Bill plot, set and save each football pitch template on the sports field onto the Samsung tablet. "This machine is perfect for single sites, such as schools, training grounds and sport clubs," Simon says. "It'll save Bill so much time. He could mark a 11v11 pitch with as little as one and a half litres of pre-mixed, ready to use Impact paint, take it out to the field, press play and the robot will start marking the pitch – allowing him to get on with other jobs at the school," he says, adding that a fully-charged battery will last around three to four hours.

Bill says the TinyLineMarker Sport has given him a huge amount of flexibility: "It gives me the ability to move the pitches around if certain areas wear and, with school activities changing all the time, I can now get some lines overmarked in just 20 minutes the night before a game," he says.

Bill says its cost-effective too. He has already calculated that if he marks out every week the TinyLineMarker Sport will pay for itself within a year.

Within the school's classroom



Bill Malins (right), with Ethan Suckling (left), who won a competition to name the linemarker

environment, Ian is planning to bring the TinyLineMarker Sport technology into the curriculum. "Our school motto is 'excellence, innovation and respect' and we're proud to be one of the first schools to use this cutting-edge technology to shape and adapt our sports provision," Ian says. "We plan to use it to discuss programming, IT and design technology within the classroom, and we even ran a competition asking students to 'name our robot,'" he explains, announcing that the winning name 'Oakey', submitted by Ethan Suckling, was selected from those submitted

However, whether the students will get any learning done when they could look out of the window and watch the robot, Ian says "we'll have to wait and see. I know when I was their age, I would've spent all day watching it at work!"

For more information visit rigbytaylor.com

