

Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date: 5th March 2026

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Report: Grass Pitch Enhancement Works

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with:

- An update on the condition and maintenance of Council football pitches.
- Review of quotations received for enhancement works.
- Confirmation of the Football Foundation maintenance grant position.
- Details of existing maintenance arrangements and delivery history.
- Benchmark comparison with alternative contractor pricing.
- Financial implications and Council budget provision.

2. Background

Recent PitchPower inspections identified variable pitch quality across the recreation grounds, particularly Southbrook and Penhill, with key issues including:

- soil compaction
- slow drainage and waterlogging
- reduced grass coverage
- increasing thatch levels
- reduced sward quality

These issues impact:

- playability and safety
- match cancellations
- long term asset condition
- compliance with Football Foundation standards

The Football Foundation and FA Regional Pitch Advisors recommend structured maintenance programmes including aeration, decompaction, fertilisation and surface improvements to restore pitch quality and maintain funding eligibility.

3. Existing Maintenance Programme

3.1 Current Delivery

The Council operates an established grass pitch maintenance programme, including:

Aeration and Decompaction

- Undertaken for the past four years.
- Mix of Verti-Drain and Verti-Quake treatments carried out.
- Typically two x per annum across all sites.
- Works aligned with Football Foundation recommendations.

Top Dressing

- Undertaken periodically where budget allows.
- Used to improve surface condition and protect drainage infrastructure.

Fertilisation

- Fertiliser applications undertaken to support turf health and recovery.

Weed Control

- Annual selective herbicide treatment delivered by Idverde as part of the Council's grounds maintenance contract.

This programme demonstrates an ongoing commitment to pitch improvement and compliance with Football Foundation maintenance standards.

3.2 Outcomes of Current Approach

The maintenance regime has:

- maintained pitch usability,
- supported grass recovery and turf quality,
- supported Football Foundation funding compliance.

However, recent inspections indicate increasing maintenance pressures at some sites, requiring further targeted intervention.

4. Proposed Works

- Verti-Drain deep aeration
- Verti-Quake decompaction
- Supply and application of sports sand top dressing

These works aim to improve drainage.

4.2 Costs

Site	Pitches Covered	Subtotal	Total incl. VAT
Southbrook Recreation Ground	1 × 11v11 + American Football	£7,040	£8,448
Moredon Sporting Hub	4 pitches	£10,660	£12,792
Mannington Recreation Ground	4 pitches	£14,080	£16,896
Seven Fields	3 pitches	£10,560	£12,672

Total programme value: approximately **£41,000 + VAT**

Verti-drain cost per pitch: **£350.00**

Top Dressing cost per pitch: **£2,820.00**

5. Benchmarking

To ensure value for money, comparable pricing has been obtained from an alternative specialist sports turf contractor.

5.1 Comparable Pricing

Work	Cost
Verti-Drain all 13 pitches	£5,525
Transport and accommodation	£2,000
Total	£7,525 + VAT

Verti-drain cost per pitch: **£579.00 per pitch**

This is consistent with market pricing and comparable.

5.2 Comparable Top Dressing Quote

- Sand Supply (60tn sand per pitch): Total cost: **£37,440 + VAT**
- Rootzone Alternative: Total cost: **£45,240 + VAT**
- Spreading Cost: Total cost: **£12,480 + VAT**

Transport: **£2,000.00**

Total programme value: approximately **£49,920 - £57,720**

Total cost per pitch - **£3,840.00 - £4,440.00**

5.3 Eco Dressing (Alternative)

Eco dressing is a specialist pitch renovation process that improves soil structure and drainage by mechanically breaking up compacted soil and incorporating sand or rootzone material into the surface. This improves drainage, turf health and pitch performance and is commonly used as a cost effective alternative to full pitch reconstruction.

Work	Cost
Eco dress all 13 pitches	£14,300.00
Transport	£2,000.00
Total	£16,300 + VAT

Equivalent cost per pitch: **£4,134.00 - £4,734.00 per pitch**

5.4 Benchmark Comparison Summary

Work Type	Contractor A	Comparable Pricing	Market Position
Verti-Drain	Competitive	Comparable	Within market range
Verti-Quake / decompaction	Competitive	Comparable	Within market range
Sand supply and spreading	Higher cost element	Comparable but significant cost	Requires further review

The benchmarking confirms that aeration and decompaction pricing is competitive, while top dressing and sand supply represent the highest cost component of enhancement works.

6. Football Foundation Grant Position

6.1 Grant Status

The Council is currently entering **Year 5** of the Football Foundation grass pitch maintenance grant.

This operates on a sliding scale funding model, with reduced grant contribution in later years.

6.2 Year 5 Financial Example

Project Cost	Grant Contribution	Council Contribution
£12,104.00	£3,994.00	£8,110.00

This represents a significant reduction in external funding compared to earlier years.

6.3 Implications

- Increased financial responsibility for the Council
- Greater importance of prioritising essential works
- Need to ensure value for money

7. Council Budget Provision

The Council allocated: **£30,000** in the 2026/27 financial year for grass pitch enhancement works.

This provides sufficient funding for essential aeration and decompaction works but requires prioritisation and effective management of higher cost elements such as top dressing.

8. Benefits

- Improves pitch safety and performance
- Supports Football Foundation compliance
- Protects existing infrastructure
- Reduces cancellations due to waterlogging
- Maintains provision of grassroots football

9. Risks

- Reduced grant funding increases Council financial exposure
- Top dressing represents significant financial commitment
- Full enhancement programme may exceed available budget

10. Officer Assessment

The Council has maintained a structured pitch maintenance programme over the past three years, including twice yearly aeration and decompaction delivered by Merrett, fertilisation, periodic top dressing, and annual weed control.

Benchmark comparison confirms Verti-Drain and Verti-Quake pricing is competitive and represents essential maintenance aligned with Football Foundation guidance. Top dressing and sand supply represent the largest cost component and require further market testing to ensure value for money before commitment.

A phased approach is therefore considered appropriate.

11. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

1. **APPROVE** continuation of Verti-Drain and Verti-Quake treatments across priority sites at a total cost of £8,500 within the 2026/27 200/5500 budget.
2. **DEFER** approval of sports sand top dressing works pending further review of comparable contractor pricing and value for money.
3. **NOTE** the Council's entry into Year 5 of the Football Foundation grant cycle and associated reduction in grant funding.
4. **NOTE** the Council's existing structured maintenance programme, including:
 - three years of aeration and decompaction treatments;
 - twice yearly Verti-Drain and Verti-Quake treatments;
 - periodic fertilisation and top dressing;
 - annual weed control delivered by Idverde.
5. **RECEIVE** a further report following completion of procurement comparison prior to any approval of top dressing works.