

Leisure & Recreation Committee Report

Report Title: Grass Pitch Enhancement Programme

Date: 2nd April 2026

Report Author: Andrew Briggs – Head of Ops

Council Priority: To provide high quality recreational facilities and support grassroots football provision

1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks Member approval to:

- Allocate further 2026/27 budget provision for grass pitch maintenance;
- Utilise Football Foundation grant funding in partnership with the Swindon Saturday and Sunday Football Leagues;
- Deliver a programme of pitch renovation works including scarifying, overseeding (grass seed) and fertilisation.

2. Background

Members previously approved a programme of specialist aeration works delivered by S. Merrett Services Ltd, comprising:

- Verti-Drain (deep aeration)
- Verti-Quake (deep decompaction)

These works represent the highest priority intervention identified through PitchPower inspections to address soil compaction and drainage issues.

3. Progress Update – Approved Works

- **Verti-Drain works have now been completed** across all four sites:
 - Mannington Recreation Ground
 - Sevenfields
 - Southbrook Recreation Ground
 - Moredon Sporting Hub
- **Verti-Quake works are scheduled for Autumn 2026**, aligning with best practice seasonal timing.

Total cost of approved Merrett works: **£8,500**

4. Remaining Budget Position

The Council has approved:

- **£30,000.00 – Grass Pitch Enhancement Budget (2026/27)**
- **£7,452.00 – Additional allocation for Moredon Sporting Hub**

Total available funding: £37,000

Less approved Merrett works: £8,500

Remaining Council budget: £28,500

5. Football Foundation Funding

The Council continues to work in partnership with:

- Swindon Saturday Football League
- Swindon Sunday Football League

It is anticipated that Football Foundation maintenance funding of approximately £15,000 will be received across all sites.

This funding is specifically intended to support:

- grass pitch maintenance
- surface improvement works
- ongoing compliance with PitchPower recommendations

6. Total Available Funding Envelope

Funding Source	Amount
Council Budget (remaining)	£28,952
Football Foundation (anticipated)	£15,000
Total Available	£43,952

7. Proposed Enhancement Works

Following completion of aeration works, the next stage of pitch improvement is turf recovery and surface renovation.

Idverde have provided the following pricing (per pitch):

Operation	Cost per pitch
Scarifying	£684.25
Grass seed	£699.20
Fertiliser (supply + application)	£404.80

Recommended package per pitch (excluding overseeding application):

£1,788.25 per pitch

(Note: overseeding application can be included if required, but seed and establishment remain the primary requirement.)

7.1 Total Cost (10 Pitches)

Work	Total
Scarifying	£6,842
Grass seed	£6,992
Fertiliser	£4,048
Total	£17,882

8. Rationale for Proposed Works

Following aeration and decompaction, Football Foundation guidance recommends:

- Overseeding to restore grass coverage
- Fertilisation to support turf recovery
- Scarification to remove thatch and improve surface condition

These works:

- improve pitch quality and resilience
- reduce bare areas and mud patches
- enhance playing surface consistency
- support long-term pitch sustainability

9. Timing of Works

As confirmed by Idverde:

The best time to carry out these works is immediately following the end of the football season.

Works will therefore be scheduled:

- Late spring / early summer (May/June), or
- Early autumn where required

This ensures optimal growing conditions and establishment.

10. Operational Implications

Members should note:

- Overseeding and fertilisation will result in temporary increased grass growth, requiring increased mowing during establishment (typically 4 - 8 weeks).
- This is expected and supports long-term pitch improvement.

The Council's existing grounds maintenance contract is capable of accommodating this increased workload. There may be additional costs. However, these will comfortably be covered by existing budgets.

11. Financial Assessment

Programme	Cost
Merrett (approved works)	£8,500
Idverde proposed works	£17,882
Total Programme Cost	£26,382

This remains:

- within Council budget provision; and
- significantly supported by Football Foundation funding.

Remaining contingency (approx.): **£17,000**

12. Strategic Assessment

Benefits

- Completes full Football Foundation recommended maintenance cycle
- Builds on completed aeration works
- Improves pitch quality and playability
- Reduces cancellations
- Maximises use of external funding

Risks

- Temporary increase in mowing requirements
- Weather dependency for successful establishment
- **Scarification Arisings**

Scarification works will generate organic arisings (thatch and surface debris). The current proposal is for this material to be left on site in agreed locations. While this represents a cost-effective and sustainable approach, there is a risk that poorly managed arisings could result in visual impact, obstruction, or localised turf damage.

To mitigate this, arisings will be placed in designated areas away from pitches and public access routes and managed appropriately. Officers will assess site suitability and, where necessary, consider removal of arisings from more sensitive or high profile locations.

Officers will retain discretion to remove arisings from site where necessary to avoid adverse impact on pitch use or public amenity.

13. Officer Recommendation

Members are recommended to:

1. **Approve the allocation of funding** for pitch renovation works comprising:
 - Scarifying
 - Grass seed application
 - Fertilisation
2. **Approve utilisation of Football Foundation funding** (circa £15,000) to support delivery of these works.
3. **Approve** recommendation of overall cost to Full Council for formal approval.
4. **Note that Verti-Drain works have been completed and Verti-Quake works are scheduled for Autumn 2026** as part of the approved programme.
5. **Note that the proposed works represent the next stage of a structured pitch improvement programme**, aligned with Football Foundation and FA guidance.