

# CRICKET

## Interim Works and Fit for Play

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

Recreational and grassroots playing facilities will currently have many questions about the current and potential restrictions the Government may impose to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus with regards to playing surfaces, their ongoing maintenance and what works may be carried out to provide a fit for play surface when sport resumes.

This document sets out what may happen to playing surfaces and the soils beneath should they be left alone for lengthy periods, what can currently be done to maintain them and also what works can be carried out should play resume.

**Please ensure you always follow government guidelines ([www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)) should you be permitted to work outdoors either as lone workers or as part of a team.**

**Recreational and grassroots playing surfaces are typically 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, who should ensure all employees are informed of and are following Government guidelines. Subject to Government policy, your employer should determine with you whether your continued work is necessary, essential, and/or safe.

**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. We advise regular review as Government guidelines develop. Ultimately it is your decision to suspend operations or, to continue to work. The emphasis though is to ensure safe working practices, as communicated by Government. Make plans now for the future and reschedule appointments where you can and keep reassessing this in order that when restrictions are lifted you are able then to return to projects that may have been suspended.

**Volunteers** should follow latest Government guidelines and not put themselves or others at risk. We advise that the volunteer network monitors the timings of any announcements of the various sports re opening for play, however realistically this will be dependent on how we are able to slow the virus down and return to normality.

## RETURN TO PLAY IN A CRICKET CLUB SETTING

This guidance comprises information on preparing your grounds for when recreational clubs can return to playing cricket (Step 4 of the ECB Roadmap for the Return of Recreational Cricket).

Government guidance on the phased return of outdoor sport and recreation in England does not currently permit any cricket activity in groups of more than six people. Until the Government permits it, no competitive recreational cricket should be played, and ECB updated small group guidance on permitted recreational cricket activity during COVID-19 must be followed. Once we have permission to move to ECB Step 4, the ECB will issue its Step 4 Playing Guidance.

### Mowing heights of cut (HoC) for play

## CRICKET

	<b>Suggested HoC</b>	<b>How much to remove</b>	<b>Frequency (where possible)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Cricket – Square</b>	12 – 15 mm <i>(a typical normal cutting height for the season)</i>	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week	See Below
<b>Cricket - Outfield</b>	14 - 18mm <i>(a typical normal cutting height for the season)</i>	Max 1/3rd of leaf height;	Once or twice per week	See Below
<b>Cricket – Pitch</b>	4 - 6mm <i>(a typical normal cutting height for the season)</i>		Daily	See Below

## **1: Preparation to start playing matches**

Now is the time to prepare your ground for play – that means getting the grass to the right heights for play, making the ground safe and getting all the equipment ready. Have a walk over the outfield and square, fix any holes or damage. Get ground equipment such as sight screens and covers ready, and if you have not done so already – get your practice facilities ready for use.

Check that your grounds maintenance equipment is in good and safe working order. It is possible that annual servicing could have been missed during lockdown so make sure that your equipment servicing is up to date. You should check whether the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) apply in your club's circumstances and act accordingly.

### **Regular maintenance so far (70-100% of normal)**

The work required will depend on how the square has been maintained, if Regular maintenance (70 – 100% of your normal in-season maintenance) has been carried out and practice has taken place on the square, your normal pitch preparation will now be required to be reinstated (Normal Pitch preparation is between 7 – 14 days).

When preparing and using pitches on the square for net practice, ensure that a number of pitches are allocated for use when play starts (at this point in the season the square would normally have had 50% of play/usage)

### **Limited maintenance so far**

If you have only been able to carry out limited maintenance the first operation is to reduce the grass height on both square and outfield, the height of cut on the square/outfield must now be lowered to the normal height for the playing season (Square 12-15 mm. Outfield 14 - 18mm). This should be done gradually, reducing the height of cut by no more than one-third of the leaf height (a rotary mower maybe needed first, once the grass height is 25mm and below, use your normal pitch cylinder mower (square) and your normal outfield mower) all clippings must be collected.

A gradual increase in other maintenance activities including a fertiliser application will help to produce a suitable playing surface quickly. The actual length of time needed to become fully playable and to what standard will also depend on the condition of the surface in the first place.

### **No maintenance so far**

No Maintenance carried out – contact your local County Pitch Advisor (Through your Cricket board) to arrange a visit to assess the square/outfield and devise a plan for playing again.

When the correct height of cut has been achieved and any damage has been repaired, normal maintenance should be resumed.

## **2: Preparing Match Pitches**

- Identify the pitch

Create a plan of your square and match the remaining fixture to the pitches. Try to use pitches alternatively to reduce damage to new pitches during play, this is vital in planning the pitches.

- Verticut/Rake out the pitch

Rake out the pitch (height of cut set between 8 – 10mm) to lift grasses and remove surface dead grass and rubbish, if using a verti-cutting unit ensure it is set no lower than 2-3mm above the soil surface. If you mark the soil then dry a pitch out the marks will increase in size and could affect the ball bounce. This is to be carried out within the first 2 days of preparation.

- Mow/Brush the pitch

Brush the pitch to lift creeping stems and leaves before mowing to create an even surface and to thin the grass coverage.

Mow up and down the same strip covering a pitch, gradually reducing the height over the pitch preparation time until match height is reached (4 - 6mm), this is to be carried out on a daily basis from 5-7 days before any match.

- Irrigate the pitch

Water to a depth to ensure the depth of loam profile has been wet, not adding enough water could produce a surface crust which may lead to the top of the pitch breaking up. The ideal time to water is in early morning or evening. Never irrigate in full sun. Leave 24 hours before rolling can start. Make sure the surface has time to dry before it is used.

- Roll the pitch

Using your normal pitch roller and 24 hours after any irrigation, as a guide you need to roll in 20-minute blocks during pitch preparation, decreasing the time 3-4 days before the match, use your normal covers (roll-on/sheets) to cover the pitch to control the drying process when required.

Rolling early in the morning when the soils are moist allows improved smoothness and compaction, but pitches only really get harder as they begin to dry out and the soil shrinks. Pace and bounce increases as the pitch dries

- Final prep

Within 24 hours of the game, the pitch should be brushed and cut at your normal match day height of cut, rolled (avoid bringing too much moisture up) and then marked out (Using your normal practice).

- Cover as required in the run up to a game to prevent the pitch getting wet.

### 3: Fertilising

Fertilisation is necessary in order to maintain the sort of relatively dense and resilient turf needed for cricket now that cutting is more frequent, and clippings are being removed. Apply nutrients as required based on signs of nutrient deficiency, now is the time to introduce your normal fertiliser programme.

Remember best practice is to collect and remove clippings when cutting on squares – therefore in this period of grass growth nutrient will need to be replaced – keep an eye out for yellowing/reddening leaves, red thread disease and other indicators of nutrient stress and apply fertiliser as necessary. Always apply fertilisers in accordance with the product label.

### 4: Weeds

**At the grass roots level, we have to readily accept that weeds are part of everyday life on the playing surface. Ideally these should be kept to a minimum.**

The soil contains many viable weed and grass seeds, and some will germinate. Normally they need space to do this, so if you can minimise bare patches and brush off worm casts quickly weed invasion will be slowed down. Weeds can have an effect on how the ball behaves from the pitch. Most weeds can be cut out on the square/pitch and the hole plugged with loam and a little seed. The outfield/square may require weed control and should be carried out by qualified operators only

### 5: Irrigation

**Square:** Water plays a major part in ensuring grass growth especially during the establishment phase of development following repairs or renovation. Irrigation should be carried out as and when needed as indicated by weather conditions for the health of the grass plant.

Due to dry weather in some areas of the country, watering of the square maybe needed to prevent the square cracking and getting too dry, it is important to retain moisture within the loam of the square to help to produce consistent pitches and ease pitch preparation.

### 7: Repairs to playing surface

Take time to repair those areas that have been damaged (Pitch foot holes). Initially this could be pitch foot hole repairs to prolong the life of a pitch (For further information [Click here](#)). But then follow this up with light renovations (surface aeration), a light fertiliser application, over seeding and light top-dressing of thin areas, followed up with regular watering to aid germination and establishment

When the pitch ends are repaired, the pitch should be:

1. Brushed
2. Watered
3. Surface aerated, normally with a shallow spike roller, to facilitate over seeding
4. Fertiliser applied

For further information [Click here](#)

### **9: Non turf pitches (NTP)**

Do not neglect Non-Turf Pitches. Maintain in accordance with the supplier/installer maintenance guidelines (brushed, weeds and moss removed and rolled where recommended).

### **10: End of Season Maintenance (Renovation)**

This year with Covid 19 has resulted in cancelled fixtures, with pitches unused and clubs facing a serious loss of income.

As the end of the season approaches club committees faced with a loss of income will be looking to make savings, and it will be tempting and indeed understandable for them to consider economising on end of season repairs to a square that has hardly been used, this is not the case and renovation is even more essential this year.

#### **Why carry out End of Season Maintenance (renovate)?**

It is recognised that post season cricket square renovation, undertaken in a correct and professional manner, forms the foundation for quality pitches throughout the following season. If a renovation is not carried out then this is likely to result in more cost outlay in the future years to repair the damage created by not renovating the square this year.

- Just because pitches have not been used does not mean they should not be renovated at the end of the season. The grass this year has grown strongly and produced waste plant material on the surface, known as 'Thatch'. This organic material must be removed from the square at the end of every season no matter if the pitches have not been used.
- This is important to prevent the organic matter becoming integrated into the soil over the winter months. If this is allowed to happen, then it will produce a sponge type layer on the surface of the square for the following playing season, with the potential of creating a surface which has inconsistent bounce, limited pace and carry.
- Over-time thatch will become fully integrated as organic matter into the soil, making the preparation of quality playing surface difficult. In a normal season thatch is controlled to a large extent by regular pitch preparation and players running over the square in spikes – this will not have taken place this year.
- We understand that funds are tight in 2020 but thatch forming conditions have been prevalent and without renovation at the end of the season problems can be created for the future. The following guidance looks at cost effective renovation.

## **When to carry out End of Season Maintenance?**

Renovation should only take place once the playing season has been completed and no further games are to be played. Work can then be carried out to ensure the square is prepared for the following season.

- To start renovations, you need to make sure that ground conditions are suitable.
  - Initially dry to aid effective scarification.
  - Grass shaves short to allow effective scarification.
  - New seed will need soil moisture to germinate so if it is not raining, then irrigation must be available.
- The ideal time to carry out the renovation is normally September.
- The ground temperature has been warmed up but is now cooling down
- Air temperature is also cooling down with moisture (Dew) being present most mornings
- Rain showers are more likely as we start to go into Autumn, irrigation may still be required, but there is a greater chance that irrigation will happen through rainfall.

## **What End of season Maintenance should take place?**

A suggested minimum renovation programme to ensure the long-term health and consistent playability of your square could be

- Scarify all pitches on the square to remove thatch and collect arisings, carry out a minimum of two passes (working below any thatch layer, with at least one pass at a minimum of 5 mm depth)
- Over sow with a fine leaved dwarf rye grass blend suitable for cricket.
- Apply a pre seeding or autumn winter fertiliser
- Apply a light dressing of your normal cricket loam to repair and level worn ends and help germinate the seed (normal recommendations are 8 x 20kg bags per pitch), reducing this by 40% across the square could be acceptable to fit with current budgets, depending on the number of pitch ends damaged by use.

### **Other things to consider:**

If you did not manage to get an end of season renovation in at the end of 2019 because of the wet winter it is really important to renovate in 2020 to:

- restore grass cover
- reduce the amount of annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) which can wear easily and grow horizontally affecting pitch quality

Therefore, you might need to consider additional scarification and overseeding to help increase the quantity of desirable perennial ryegrass in your square.

The prevalence of annual meadow grass in swards will be increased in 2020 because of low usage, limited maintenance, and the weather. If you have had a low maintenance regime through lockdown then it might also be necessary to do additional scarification and overseeding.

Top Dressing can be reduced to the minimum amount required to cover the scarifying lines and help new seed to germinate, other minor levels can be addressed next year, this year with limited budgets a reduction in top dressing will assist the club to manage financial issues. Buying in bulk (1-ton bags) can reduce costs but carry out a manual handling assessment and make sure that you can cover the bags to keep the loam dry.

### **Employing Contractors, Carrying out End of Season Maintenance**

When employing contractors to carry out the end of season maintenance, it is important that the work is carried out in accordance with what the square requires and not just the 'normal package', all squares are different and will have been managed differently in 2020, so ensure that the work carried out is in-line with what is required on a yearly basis for your square. Make sure that when you appoint the contractor you have:

- A clear description of the works to be carried out (the number of passes with the scarifier, the specification, type and quantity of seed, fertiliser, and loam topdressing).
- A work programme (details of amount/number regarding operations outlined above)
- Quality to be attained (standard to be attained)
- A projected start/end date (discuss options if delays happen)

### **For further information go to:**

The essential guide to cricket Groundsmanship - [here](#)

Pitch Doctor Videos - [Click here](#)



## CLOSING STATEMENT

### **RETURN TO ACTIVITY IN A CRICKET CLUB SETTING?**

For further information regarding changes in cricket operations guidance, review news updates on the ECB website [www.ecb.co.uk](http://www.ecb.co.uk). This guidance will be updated and is likely to change in response to Government policy and other best practice guidance.

**Please always ensure you adhere to up to date government guidelines ([www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)) regarding the current situation.**

The main message to cricket ground staff / volunteers is to continue good maintenance practices and start to prepare to start playing matches at your particular facility.

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