

July 2011

The RFL

Natural Turf Pitches Transition to Summer Rugby League



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RFL Pitch Assessments and the development of an RFL Grass pitch Maintenance Programme for Tier 3 Clubs

The RFL is currently running three programs to support its objective to improve the quality, safety and performance of Rugby League natural turf pitches:

- RFL Grass Pitch Remediation Program
- RFL Grass Pitch Maintenance Program
- RFL Turf Care Training and Development Program

The RFL Grass Pitch Remediation program includes a full Pitch Feasibility Study at nominated clubs. These will be carried out by the RFL's selected contractor TGMS. The resulting report will provide details of the condition of the pitch against recognised Performance Quality Standards (PQS) and an outline of the work required to fully augment the performance of the pitch. The report will also include an estimate of the cost of the work. The RFL will work with clubs to determine how best those costs can be met.

For a limited number of clubs the RFL will carry out the work outlined within their report in summer 2011/summer 2012.

The Grass Pitch Maintenance Program will use the reports discussed above to develop a maintenance program specifically tailored to individual site conditions, and aimed at improving the safety and sustainability of pitches during the transition from winter to summer. Rugby League has arguably the worst pitches in sport and the transition of compacted winter pitches, often not maintained adequately, to summer means that there is a clear focus over the transition period on repair and appropriate maintenance of grass turf pitches.

This work will be carried out where required focussed largely on Tier 3 clubs in autumn 2011 and spring 2012

The RFL is also developing a Turf Care Training and Development program to provide both training and support to Rugby League grounds staff whether voluntary or professional. The RFL are also working with Sport England and other pitch sport's National Governing Bodies to develop systems to support the improved understanding and maintenance of sports pitches and a number of pilot studies are underway.

The following outline is provided by Dr Richard Earle, Managing Director, TGMS Ltd

During the period from 11th July 2011 to 8th August 2011, all clubs will be visited by a specialist pitch consultant from TGMS Ltd.

The consultant will conduct an assessment of the condition of the pitch(es) against recognised Performance Quality Standards. The results will be used to develop an agronomic maintenance programme to be administered in the autumn and following spring (April 2012) with particular focus on improving the safety and performance of pitches during the transition from winter to summer seasons. It will be the responsibility of the club with their partners to administer the maintenance programme.

The aim of the maintenance programme will be to target the limited funding available to address issues such as:

- Increasing density of grass cover
- Optimising grass height
- Application of top dressing sand
- Decompaction
- Increasing depth of grass rooting

The maintenance programmes will be tailored according to conditions encountered at individual sites and it is anticipated that these will be produced for all Tier 3 Clubs by 12th August 2012 with a view to conducting the operations in September/October 2011 and April 2012. The autumn operations (September/October) need to be conducted when there is still sufficient daylight hours and elevated soil temperatures for grass to grow and so these will need to be conducted during the playing season which is suboptimal but unavoidable. It is therefore proposed that operations will be confined to those that will permit the pitches to be played on immediately afterwards.

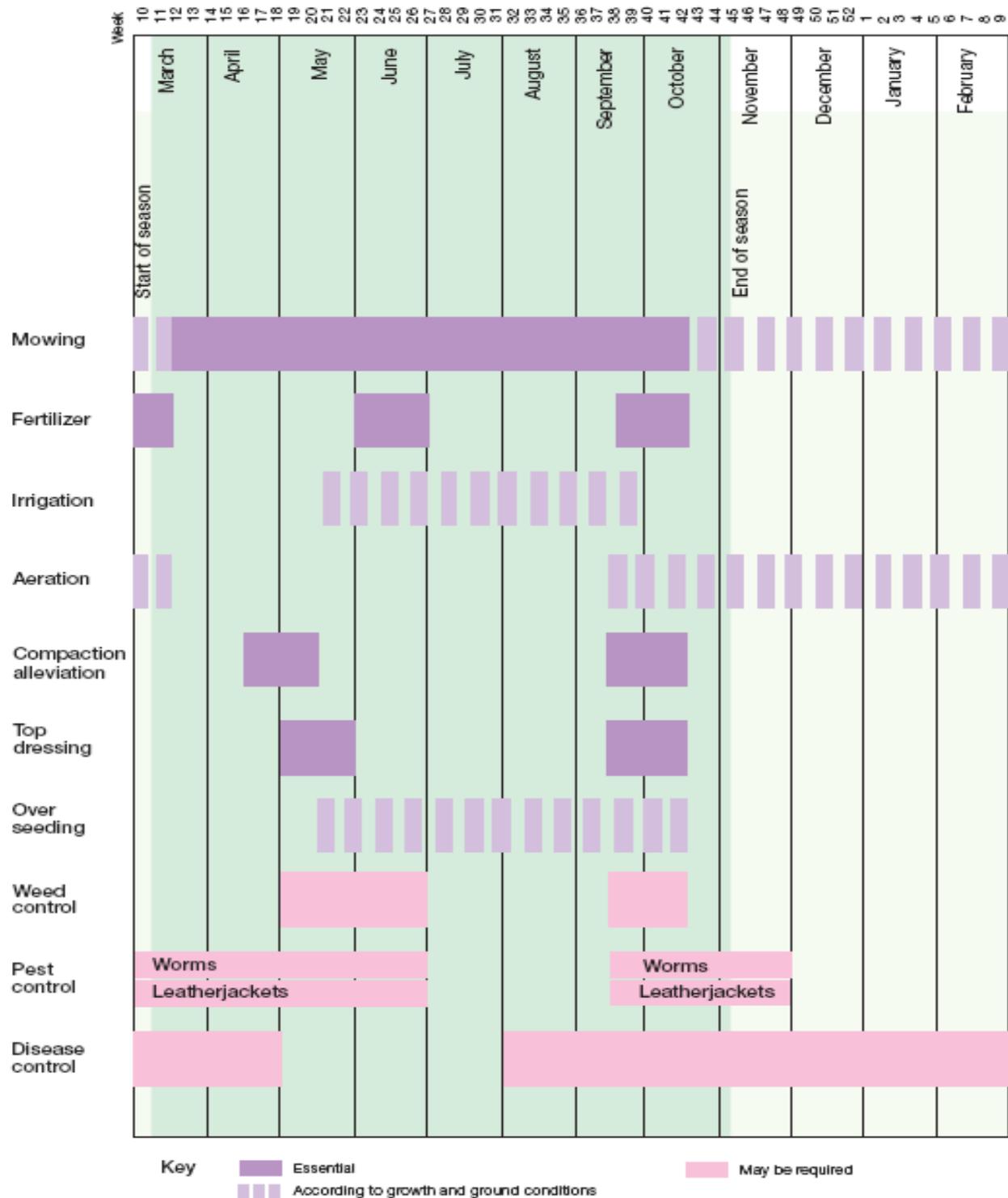
In parallel with the above, a geophysical and levels survey will be conducted by a Field Engineer from TGMS Ltd and the results will be used in conjunction with those from the Consultant's visit to produce a detailed Feasibility Study for each club which will provide a comprehensive report on pitch provision. The Field Engineer visits commenced w/c 27 June 2011 and it is anticipated that these will continue through the summer to w/c 10 October 2011. It is also anticipated that all of the Feasibility Study reports will also be completed by week commencing 17 October 2011.

It should be noted that the effect of the proposed maintenance operations on pitch condition will be gradual and that the benefits of adequate maintenance may take a number of years to accrue but is key to providing safe and sustainable natural turf pitches. For information, Sport England guidance on typical operations required is set out in the publication **Natural Turf for Sport** (Sport England, 2011)¹, and summarised in Appendix A.

¹ http://www.sportengland.org/facilities_planning/design_guidance_notes.aspx?sortBy=alpha&pageNum=

Natural Turf for Sport

Design
Guidance Note



Summer Rugby League: Summary pitch maintenance programme