

TECHNICAL

YOUR INDUSTRY-LEADING REFERENCE GUIDE



Encouraging the growth of eco rough is a great environmental practice

SUSTAINABILITY IN PRACTICE

This article takes a look at sustainable practices with a view to helping those at the sharp end to implement a step-by-step plan of action

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These are challenging economic times, with spiralling input prices and pressures on spending. The chill wind is reaching everyone and the pressures on those who manage and operate sports facilities are high. However, those directly involved are still expected to produce high-quality areas that are fit for purpose, even though budgets are squeezed. Added to this is the great emphasis placed on sustainability and implementing sustainable practice.

In my opinion, sustainable practice does not usually require a

major change in workload. In fact, sustainable practice is good practice and it is likely that much that is already being done in well-managed organisations is sustainable. However, small steps can make a difference in

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achieving further improvements. In every case, the process starts with a proper audit of current practice followed by creating and implementing plans for improvement.

If you look at the management of a sports complex, it is important to remember the three components of sustainability as illustrated on the following page (see Figure 1).

The first key task in any situation is to be economically viable – in other words, deliver to a budget. The cost of purchasing inputs such as machinery and fertilisers, as well as the overhead

costs including labour, must be met by income generated. Can actions to improve sustainability contribute to reducing costs? Yes, they can.

To repeat, sustainable practice is best defined as good practice. It is about adopting that integrated approach, developing a preventative culture in terms of, say, weeds, pests and diseases, rather than a problem-solving one, and creating the very best conditions for grass growth and health, which will inevitably lead to lower costs of its maintenance.

ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL

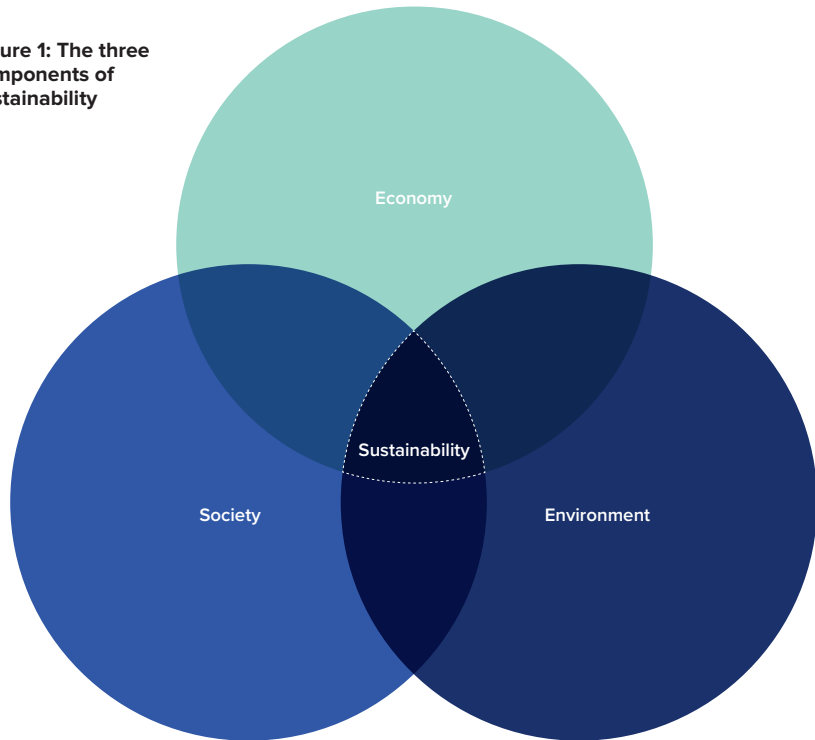
Just one example of such action is tree planting. Trees are a fantastic means of carbon capture. However, planting in the right place is essential. A tree planted today is going to grow and this must be assessed at the outset. Many cases are reported now of trees planted 50 or so years ago looming over a sportsturf playing surface. Grass, as we know, is a sun-loving plant and often will not perform very well in shade. Removal of these trees may be a difficult decision, but in the overall picture of creating a more sustainable area with less turf disease, it may be absolutely the right thing to do.

With fewer pesticides now available, the removal of trees (now in the wrong place) will assist in managing a sportsturf playing surface, with less intervention for disease, as natural sunlight and improved airflow will greatly assist growing conditions. It is sustainable practice in action, especially if new trees are also planted in the right place.

Another example is the encouragement of eco rough around any sports site. Holistically managed eco rough reduces mowing and therefore lowers fuel costs, work hours and carbon footprint. This can also have an added benefit as more bird life, flora and fauna are attracted to the site, achieving far greater biodiversity.

There are many other things that can be implemented that provide sustainable practice by protecting and enhancing the environment and in terms of social factors such as net carbon objectives. These can also make sound economic sense. When planning maintenance and design programmes small steps that help deliver sustainability can be implemented within the objective of

Figure 1: The three components of sustainability



“SMALL STEPS THAT HELP DELIVER SUSTAINABILITY CAN BE IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE OBJECTIVE OF PROVIDING QUALITY, FIT-FOR-PURPOSE PLAYING AREAS, BUT ALWAYS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN MIND

providing quality, fit-for-purpose playing areas, but always with environmental and ecological considerations in mind.

ADOPTING A GREEN MINDSET

A green mindset ensures facility owner and player requirements are met, but with decisions always considering sustainability issues. It is about reducing reliance on pesticides, for example, albeit needed in many cases, but seeking to manage and encourage nature in a sports setting that can enhance the players' and public's experience.

The use of a slow-release fertiliser can promote more efficient action and reduce waste. And there are great strides taking place in grass breeding so seeds can be chosen that are best suited to the conditions – with, say, increased tolerance to adverse weather or certain types of soil. At the heart of it all is the development of a best practice plan that takes all factors into account, including

the development of the environment and its ecology, as well as reducing energy costs.

This is already an existing practice at many sports facilities. I recently spoke to an excellent groundsperson who wanted to be more sustainable. When he listed his actions to date, including creating wildlife areas, it was clear that he was already well down the path of sustainable practice – maintaining excellent pitches within a budget while maximising environmental benefits and, wherever possible, reducing the carbon footprint.

Our sports facilities have a unique relationship with the natural environment and are already contributing greatly to UK sustainability targets. That does not mean more cannot be done: adopting best practice, creating optimal conditions for purpose, establishing environmental targets and, wherever it can be done, focusing on carbon cycles, all have a place. However, you need to keep it simple, adopt small steps and, above all, operate to the best of your abilities.

SUSTAINABILITY RESOURCES

The GMA is committed to supporting the industry and our members to work sustainably. We will be launching resources later in the year to support the development of sustainable practices.