OWA 2023 Ground Report

Whilst 2023 has seen a full schedule of sporting activities, maintaining the grounds to a good standard has again been very challenging due to the extremes of weather that have been experienced and I believe Ian Muir has managed well throughout.

Main Ground

Football – the main pitches, particularly the goalmouths, were well worn when the usual renovations were carried out, with the ground disc seeded and 40 tons of rootzone spread over the pitches. With little rain and low temperatures during the rest of April and beginning of May, deploying sprinklers for over two weeks before cricket started and then again during the month of June, the pitches were not at their best for the start of the 2023-24 season. Pre-season, new goal nets were fitted, including net support posts and new hinged bottom net frames for the nets. Special thanks to Tony Sherlock for arranging and overseeing the installation of the metal ground sockets and to some of the junior football managers/dads for help in erecting and fitting the new nets. The OWFC has reduced the number of teams it runs on Saturday to six but the number of 11-a-side junior teams on Sunday has reduced by just one to 14, with the Vets and Super Vets teams also playing regularly. The number of matches being played over the weekend is still above what should be considered as acceptable and so the pitches will again deteriorate at a faster rate, especially the goalmouths. In order to help maintain the pitches, both will be verti-drained over the Christmas break.
Although car parking on Saturday afternoons and Sundays is being monitored, gridlock on Sundays during winter months is still a possibility.

Note that, assuming cricket fixtures start on Saturday 11th May, the main ground will be available for football up to and including the weekend of the 20th/21st April 2023. Renovations will then take place over the next 19 days prior to commencement of cricket.

Cricket – There were no major problems with the roller and extensive pre-season rolling was carried out. Once again, in spite of some extreme weather, very good pitches were produced throughout the season. Although it was necessary for the sprinklers to be deployed throughout June, with parts of the outfield being very dry and rough, and several downpours later on in the season, we managed to achieve pitch markings of 85.3% (86.3% in 2022) from the Kent League panel umpires (2nd of ten for Div 1 and 10th of thirty for the top three).
The usual renovations were carried out to the square after the season ended and we should be able to maintain a similar level next year.
New cricket nets were fitted at the start of the season together with extensive repairs to parts of the artificial surface. In order to secure the nets from misuse and vandalism, fencing was also erected around the nets with gates across the entrance. Again, thanks to Tony Sherlock for organising and overseeing the drilling of holes and concreting in the fence posts and to those cricket club members who helped erect and bolt on the fence panels.
Repairs to or replacement of the covers are now a priority before the 2024 season.

Tennis – There are signs of a small area of subsidence on the far court which may need to be addressed if the situation deteriorates. Moss is now appearing on the surface of the MUGA and needs to be included in the additional spraying that has now been arranged. Ian Muir continues to spend a considerable amount of time on the courts during the autumn/winter period.

Hawes Down
Football – there continues to be significant wear in the goalmouths of the 7-a-side and 9-a-side pitches and renovations of these areas will again be required at the end of the season. Previously renovated areas remain in good condition and drainage does not seem to be a particular issue in these areas now. However, after significant rainfall in October and early November, HD was very wet and soft. I am therefore arranging for both 11-a-side pitches at HD to be verti-drained during the Christmas break, with an additional 60t of sand also spread over the pitches to help improve drainage.
A number of the junior football goal nets that were very worn have been replaced and one or two more may need to be replaced after the end of this season.
Whilst a couple of broken wheels on moveable 7aside and 9aside goals have been replaced, these are still prone to becoming detached from the main frame of the goal if the goal is pulled rather than pushed when being moved.

Please note that HD will be available for 11-a-side football up to and including Sunday 5th May 2024, with junior 9/7-a-side football guaranteed to Sunday 12th May.

Cricket – The roller was serviced early in the year and, with its weight unchanged, the square was continually rolled pre-season and pitches rolled as required during the 2023 season. As a result of the extensive rolling and renovations carried out at the end of the previous season, there was an improved condition in all pitches provided. In order for this standard to be maintained next year, post-match renovations have again included scarifying, seeding and dressing with more Ongar loam.
Extensive pre-season rolling will also be required.

General
A new irrigation system for the main ground still remains a top priority.
It was again very difficult to combat the hot dry conditions during June.
Ian Muir continues to be contracted to carry out all ground maintenance.
The amount paid to Ian Muir was increased in March by just under 5%.

On Sundays, although the OW Juniors are employing a car parking monitor and the number of parking issues is now much reduced, capacity continues to be a problem since on occasion the league schedule too many 11-a-side junior matches at home. In spite of pitches being hired at a separate ground, this situation continues to be a problem as there are fourteen 11-a-side junior teams as well as the Vets and Super-Vets.
Also, the ground along the edges of the driveway around from the main gates towards the bungalow and tennis courts continues to be worn away due the amount of parking required on these previously grassed areas.
Additional hard surface parking spaces at the main ground are now an absolute priority.

The maintenance contract for HD again comes up for renewal on the 1st March next year. The contract is subject to approval by both the OWA and the schools. I will be seeking the approval of the Heads for any new terms as well as going through any other issues that are included for discussion. Maintenance costs are now shared 50/50 between the schools and the OWA. Note that costs to outside contractors carrying out large one-off renovations are paid 100% by the OWA.

The Gardening Team continues to regularly meet every second Tuesday of the month.
Each of the memorial trees now has a plaque identifying the person for whom it was planted.