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1. Introduction

Thurrock's Public Land and open spaces enrich the quality of our lives, have a positive environmental impact and contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. They help define and add to the character and history of a place as well as provide vital green infrastructure for wildlife, biodiversity, water, tranquillity, recreation, play, food production, improved air quality and safe off-road pedestrian and cycling routes. This strategy covers Thurrock's current provision of parks, amenity greenspace (includes highways verge and roundabouts), natural and semi-natural greenspace and cemeteries and covers the period 2021 - 2027.

This strategy has been prepared to:

- Ensure that all of the boroughs public open space is effectively maintained in the most efficient and cost effective way possible.
- Inform future action plans and projects for the delivery of improvements to existing open spaces and new open spaces triggered by development.
- To facilitate the securing of funding either internal or external for the improvement and maintenance of Thurrock's public open space
- Increase biodiversity and habitats

This strategy impacts on Thurrock Councils priorities, People, Place and Prosperity. Well managed and attractive land and open space has a positive influence:

People

- Provide a space for recreation and play
- Promote community cohesion and social inclusion, as a place to meet
- Improve physical health through exercise
- Contribute to good mental health and well being
- Fostering civic pride through sense of space

Place

- Encourage biodiversity
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Promote education
- Create a natural amenity
- Provide safe, sustainable transport routes
- Assist in alleviating flood risks
- Regulate microclimates supporting local air quality

Prosperity

- Attract economic development and local investment
- Increase land and property values
- Encourage revenue streams through tourism
- Improve the image and standing of an area
- Influence location decisions for both employers and employees.

2. Key Methods of delivery

To improve the quality of our public land and open spaces we will ensure;

- A. **Planned Parks Improvement Programme**- A rolling programme of individual plans developed for the sites prioritised on the basis of quality and value findings from the Parks and Open Space needs assessment.
- B. **Working with and developing “Friends of Parks” groups and Community Volunteers**. We currently have a good working relationship with a number of these groups and we will look to build upon this in the future helping these local groups improve the parks and maximise the impact of their efforts.

- C. **Long Grass Regimes / Wildflowers / meadow planting** – Where appropriate, the use of allowing our grass to grow alongside wildflower and meadow planting will increase biodiversity and these areas will provide important habitats for insects and pollinators and provide new wildlife havens that are crucial to the development of our parks and open spaces and the wider environment.

Many factors need to be taken into consideration when introducing these areas, such as highway safety, site levels and underground services. They will be developed on a trial basis with a view to making them a permanent part of our landscape. This should decrease the amount of maintenance required, allowing resources to be targeted in other areas where improvements are required

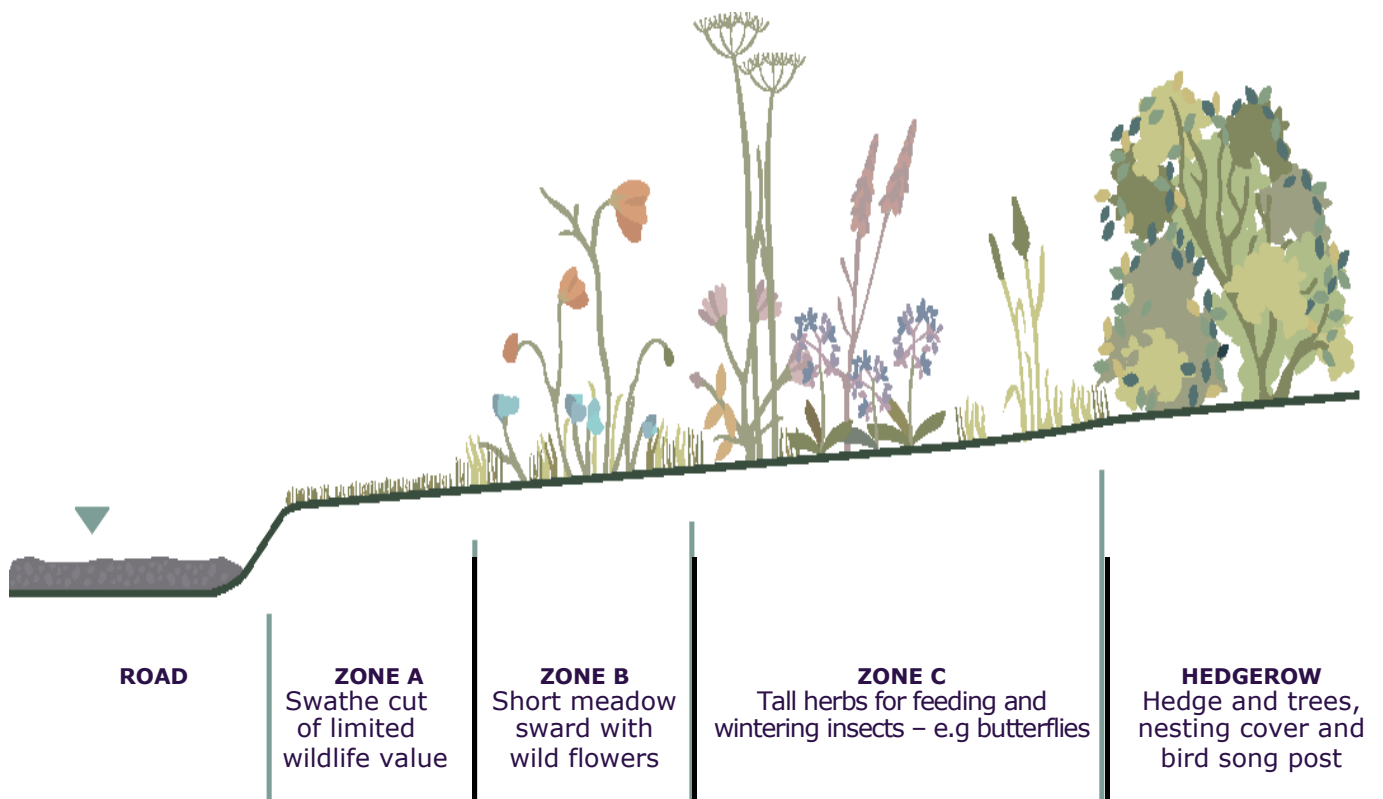
Maintenance schedules would be set to allow the wild flowers to be able to complete their full lifecycle – i.e. grow, flower and set seed, prior to them being cut. This replenishes the seed bank and allows populations to be maintained cost-free and indefinitely. Cutting too early and too frequently swiftly eliminates many species, reducing diversity and the value of the road verge. Cutting after flowers have set seed in late summer allows visually striking displays of wild flowers and a rich source of pollen and nectar for pollinators. Wild flowers take roughly six to eight weeks from flowering to setting seed.



Cutting these areas twice a year is the **management approach** that is suggested for suppressing coarse grasses and encouraging wild flowers, so reducing management burden over time.

Management option		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
One cut									full cut				
Two cuts	Summer and autumn cutting							partial cut		full cut			
	Late winter and autumn cutting		full cut						full cut				
	Dry verges (short vegetation)	regular cuts							regular cuts				
	Species-rich verges with mown edge		1m strip						full cut				

Below is the idealised management zones across the width of a roadside verge



- D. Low maintenance schemes –** Where grounds maintenance is difficult and requires traffic management, (including roundabouts) the design of low maintenance schemes enhancing and improving the presentation of the asset.

One way of achieving this is the use of low growing ground cover (as shown), the use of this type of planting not only enhances the appearance of the land, upon which it is grown, but also aids biodiversity and provides habitats. In addition to planting there are options to hard landscape and design out the maintenance burden.



- E. Tree Planting –** The planting of appropriate trees, where it is possible do so and where they will have a positive impact on the environment, this will include Council owned parks, informal open space, verges and where appropriate roundabouts throughout the borough, ensuring the replacement planting of trees that have been removed.

The Council has responsibility for the ongoing maintenance and management of over 26,000 trees (this includes the trees in parks and open spaces). As part of that responsibility approximately 150 trees could potentially be removed per year to incurable disease or tree failure, these will be replaced in line with the tree planting strategy. The Tree Strategy commits Thurrock Council to be ambitious and plant more trees than those removed. Funding bids will be submitted maximising opportunities, developers and our own development schemes are actively encouraged to optimise tree planting. Increased tree planting will increase biodiversity and habitats and also help to improve local air quality.

- F. Supporting the progress of the Council's Local Plan -** To ensure well designed, quality public spaces are delivered through new development proposals and appropriate management / maintenance arrangements are secured. Recognising that one size will be unlikely to fit all scenarios, a range of management options should be considered, i.e. developer contributions / private management companies, commuted payments.

3. Land Type / Typology

All Council managed green spaces can be divided into Six typologies based on the broad land type and function. Maintenance standards are then set according to each typology based on a range of maintenance tasks. The main typologies are:

- Typology 1 - Formal Parks and Spaces
- Typology 2 – Natural and Semi-natural Greenspaces
- Typology 3 – Amenity Green Space
- Typology 4 - Grass Verges and Roundabouts
- Typology 5 - Cemeteries and Churchyards
- Typology 6 - Outdoor Sport

Typology 1 - Formal parks and spaces

High profile areas of open space, publically accessible, close to public transport links and providing a range of facilities and features offering recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits. This includes urban parks and formal gardens (e.g. Grays Town Park). They are the most labour intensive and require a regular schedule of grounds maintenance tasks to maintain the standards.

Typology 2 - Natural / Semi-natural Greenspace

Informal and natural green space provides the opportunity to promote meaningful and safe recreation. Covering a wide range of uses including woodland areas, informal country parks (for example Oak and Ash Plantation, pictured below) and accessible wetland areas.

Typology 3 – Amenity Green space

Most commonly, but not exclusively, in residential areas including informal recreation spaces, green space in and around housing and village greens. This may also include playing fields where outdoor sport is not the primary use e.g. there are no marked out pitches and goals.

Currently most amenity green spaces are cut regularly between April and October on a cut and drop basis. This is generally carried out on a fortnightly basis, although periods of inclement weather may delay operations. Extra cuts may be added before or after these dates as necessary. Grass clippings that encroach on paved areas adjacent to the grassed areas are dispersed by the use of blower machines. Growth around obstacles in the grass such as fence lines, are controlled by strimming or selective use of herbicide spraying.

Typology 4 – Grass Verges and Roundabouts

Areas of greenspace adjacent to the public highway. There are a large network of verges throughout the borough, from urban town and village centre locations to rural roads and sections of high-speed roads. These are currently cut routinely throughout the grass cutting season.

Typology 5 – Cemeteries and Churchyards

Publically accessible churchyards and closed cemeteries, these are areas for reflection and tranquil contemplation, we currently cut every 3 weeks and are strimmed at the same time.

Typology 6 - Outdoor sports

Outdoor sports are played at parks and recreation grounds, specific playing fields and sports grounds across the borough. Sports pitches are maintained to promote true, safe, even, free draining surfaces and to provide pitches which are presented in optimum condition for use.

4. Zones

These will be used within the Typologies to set the maintenance standards, this is shown in Appendix 1. A set of three zones have been selected to group maintenance standards under specific descriptions.

They are as follows:

1 – High amenity (high maintenance)

Maintenance standard expected for high profile areas such as in formal parks and bowling greens. The tasks within this zoning include regular mowing of fine Turf areas, floral display maintenance including watering, dead-heading, pruning, weeding and fertilising.

2. – General/medium amenity (standard maintenance)

Maintenance standard expected in areas where there is a high level of general use/activity, sites such as recreation areas. The tasks within this zoning include regular mowing of park, urban grass verges, grassland and sports playing fields, grass playing pitches, including, scarification, aeration, irrigation, renovation after play and season end, informal hedge maintenance, informal shrub and non-ornamental seasonal bedding maintenance.

3. – Low amenity (low maintenance)

Maintenance standard expected in natural areas including countryside parks, rural spaces and rural grass verges. The tasks within this zoning include mowing of grass verges, highway gateways, roundabouts, meadows, rural and natural hedges.

Strategy by Land Type / Typology

Typology 1 - Formal parks and spaces



Aim – To increase use and amenity of the parks. Achieved through improved aesthetics, enhanced maintenance of formal areas (new memorial and formal beds at Grays Town Park as shown) and increasing biodiversity & habitats through the inclusion of tree and wildflower planting, and long grass regimes in other areas. Thurrock Council will seek to achieve “Green Flag” status for formal parks.

Actions

- Work with the friend of groups to identify their key priorities for their park and to jointly create an action plan specific to each park.
- Identify areas within our parks where biodiversity and habitats can be encouraged
- Enhanced cultivation of beds and planting in areas to create more formal sections
- Produce a site specific maintenance programmes

Typology 2 - Natural / Semi-natural Greenspace



Example Semi-natural Greenspace - Oak and Ask Plantation

Aim – To ensure areas are accessible to the public. Achieved through well maintained and regularly inspected assets, increased biodiversity & habitats, the inclusion of tree and wildflower planting where appropriate.

Actions

- Identify areas where further planting would support biodiversity and habitats
- Identify areas where we can plant more trees
- Carry out an audit of all of our assets within the space and put in place an appropriate inspection regime
- Look at the resource and equipment requirements for the maintenance of these areas, and what cutting regimes best suit each area, this will be replicated across all of the Typologies so that we can ensure that we have the right equipment and resources to best present the borough.

Typology 3 - Amenity Green space



Example the Delafield

Aim – To ensure that identified areas are accessible to the public. Achieved through well maintained and regularly inspected assets, reducing ongoing maintenance through wildflower planting where appropriate, increasing biodiversity & habitats through the planting of native trees and where possible orchard planting to provide free food.



Example of vehicle protection to Amenity Green Space

Actions

- Identify areas where further planting or the use of long grass regimes would support biodiversity and habitats
- Identify areas where we can plant more trees
- Carry out an audit of all of our assets within the space and put in place an appropriate inspection regime

Typology 4 – Grass Verges and Roundabouts

Verges



Example of Roadside verge

Aim – To preserve the physical integrity of the verge and have well maintained verges and assets. Achieved through disruption of parking on the grass by target hardening with fencing, planting of trees / shrubs or replacing with an alternative surface through the “Kerb It” programme, seeking to protect or replace verges that are damaged by vehicle parking.

Well maintained verges and assets, regularly inspected, increased biodiversity & habitats through inclusion of long grass regimes, tree and wildflower planting where appropriate. Creation of wild meadow areas, re-introduction of native plants as plug plants & seeds, encourage nectar-rich plants and providing cover for wildlife.

Research suggests that common plants, often thought of as 'weeds' such as dandelion, ragwort and cow parsley can provide a critical food source for pollinating insects, log piles and long grass also provide cover and nesting sites for bumblebees.

Actions

- Identify areas where further planting or the use of long grass regimes would support biodiversity and habitats
- Identify areas where we can plant more trees
- Conduct a full survey of the verges that we as a local authority are responsible for including those under both Public Realm and Housing to ensure that they are all categorised against the Zones and also with which piece of equipment that they will be maintained with, this will be done with each typology so that there is a clear and published understanding of what land is maintained by Thurrock Council, and how it is maintained.



Example of roadside wildflower planting (Not Thurrock)

Roundabouts

Essentially a type of highway verge and a “Gateway” into Thurrock. Given their visual prominence and accessibility key roundabouts require an increased presence and should give a warm welcome into the borough. They should communicate visually to travellers they are entering a new location and should represent the community and Thurrock as a whole. It is important they provide the right first impression and one of welcome.

Aim – To improve all “gateway” roundabouts into Thurrock, ensuring when people drive into Thurrock, they provide a memorable welcome. Achieved through aesthetic improvements, while reducing ongoing maintenance. Recognising the established communities in Thurrock and the differences they promote, essential community engagement and consultation will be required in informing design schemes for each “Gateway” roundabout.

There are a wide range of options including hardy perennial planting, feature trees (i.e. flowering cherry, monkey-puzzle), public art instillation (as can be seen on the Purfleet roundabout), different surfacing and wild flowers, including the use of low growing ground cover, should additional funding be secured. This also maximises commercial opportunity through the sale of advertising.



Current feature roundabout maintained by Thurrock Garden Centre

Actions

- Carry out an audit of all of our roundabouts to identify options for either hard landscaping or low maintenance planting to reduce the maintenance burden.
- To identify and work with local community groups to co-design any improvements to the roundabouts.
- On larger roundabouts, especially on the M25 and A13, Identify areas where further planting or the use of long grass regimes would support biodiversity and habitats

Typology 5 - Cemeteries and Churchyards



Example – Corringham Cemetery

Aim –. Cemeteries are a place of peace, memories and reflection, it is essential that the environment is well maintained and is welcoming and tranquil.

Actions – The Environment will be improved and enhanced (subject to securing capital funding) by:

- Conduct an assessment of our cemeteries and prepare action plans for each one.
- Identify areas where further planting or the use of long grass regimes would support biodiversity and habitats, whilst still providing a respectful environment

Typology 6 – Outdoor Sports

Aim – To maintain our outdoor sports area to the required standards, whilst looking to see where biodiversity and habitats can be accommodated. Sports maintenance charging in line with commercial rates to sports clubs unless where the council decides to subsidise this



Example of a football pitch being left to long grass out of season

Actions

- Work with the relevant sports clubs and Thurrock Councils sports development team to ensure that all of our outdoor sports areas have an action plan and maintenance schedule in place and are therefore effectively maintained and ready for play when required
- To allow for biodiversity and habitats out of season where possible (See previous picture)

New areas

The adoption of new public open space from development is undertaken by the council's Planning department. There is of course a financial implication to the Service if there is no income linked with this adoption.

The Environment service will be included on any pre adoption inspection, to ensure that the land and associated infrastructure, including Play Areas, planting, and trees. This is to ensure that the area is in a fit condition for adoption.





Aim - Where possible the allocation of funds from the developer to maintain the land for a fixed period would be beneficial (this would be calculated using a schedule of rates). If developers contributions are not available it would be preferable that another vehicle for the maintenance of the land be agreed i.e. a Management Company.





Conclusion / Recommendations


1. We should look to increase the biodiversity and habitats within the borough, whilst this may have proved to have been a contentious issue in the past, “no mow” areas and leaving grass to grow has now become a more widespread and an accepted concept, This should decrease the amount of maintenance required in some areas allowing resources to be targeted in other areas where improvements are required it is therefore recommend where possible that this is the approach taken by the Council
2. To agree the proposed maintenance standards.
3. That all green open spaces that as a local authority we are responsible for maintaining including those under both Public Realm and Housing to ensure that they are all categorised against the Zones. Also with which piece of equipment that they will be maintained with, this will be done with each typology so that there is a clear and published understanding of what land is maintained by Thurrock Council, and how it is maintained.
4. That a communication plan is put in place to inform the public of any changes to the maintenance programme and the reasons why these changes are being trailed or implemented.

Appendix 1 – Maintenance Standards by Land Typology




Typology 1 - Formal Parks and Spaces

Zoned Tasks	Zone	Definition	General Standard	Example
Grass cutting	1 - High amenity (high maintenance)	Fine quality turf areas in high profile sites, generally adjacent to ornamental features e.g. flowerbeds	Grass cut short with a uniform with a striped finish and cuttings collected or fly cut as appropriate.	
	2 - Amenity	Reasonable quality turf areas in the remainder of parks and gardens	Grass Routinely cut throughout the season to give a surface conducive to public use	
	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Meadow grass and wildflower areas generally situated in areas of amenity grass	1 – 3 cuts per year dependant on area,.	
Hedge maintenance	1 - High amenity (high maintenance)	Hedges pruned to a specific form in high profile areas generally adjacent to ornamental features	2 cuts per year Dependant on bird nesting season	





	<p>2 - Amenity</p>	<p>Good quality hedge features forming boundaries in the remainder of the parks and gardens</p>	<p>1 cut per year</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Shrub Maintenance</p>	<p>1 - High amenity (high maintenance)</p>	<p>Colourful shrub beds in high profile areas of the park, generally used to complement floral planting and bedding</p>	<p>Winter pruning once per year, define edge to border, spot treat weeds up to three times per year</p>	
	<p>2 - Amenity</p>	<p>General shrubberies providing backdrops to the remainder of parks and gardens</p>	<p>Winter cultivation, pruning once per year, spot treat weeds up to three times per year</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Border Maintenance</p>	<p>1 - High amenity (high maintenance)</p>	<p>Seasonal bedding and floral planting in high profile areas, complementing adjacent ornamental features and structures</p>	<p>Bed preparation and planting twice per year, fortnightly hand weed/ deadhead, irrigation, if required</p>	

	2 - Amenity	Seasonal bedding and rose gardens in less high profile areas of parks and gardens	Bed preparation and planting twice per year, monthly hand weed/ dead head, irrigation if required	
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Typology 2 – Natural and Semi-natural Open Spaces

Zoned Tasks	Zone	Definition	General Standard	Example
Grass cutting	2 - Amenity	General grass areas (including verges) that define pathways and ensure sites are accessible and suitable for recreational use	Grass Routinely cut throughout the season to give a surface conducive to public use	
	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Meadow sites and areas of long grass that run alongside general grassed areas	1 or 2 cuts per year, timed according to species	
Hedge maintenance	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Hedges bordering natural spaces shall not cause obstructions	1 cut per year during the winter programme	





Typology 3 – Amenity Green Spaces

Zoned Tasks	Zone	Definition	General Standard	Example
Grass cutting	2 – Amenity	This standard of maintenance ensures we can provide useable and attractive recreational areas for residents	Grass Routinely cut throughout the season to give a surface conducive to public use	
Hedge maintenance	2 – Amenity	Good quality hedge features that form boundaries in the majority of amenity open spaces	1 cut per year during the winter programme	
	2 – Amenity	Field hedges bordering amenity green spaces and rural areas, often located on the urban fringe	1 cut per year during the winter programme	
Shrub maintenance	2 - Amenity	This maintenance regime ensures shrub beds are kept tidy and add character to the area	Pruning once per year, spot treat weeds up to three times per year	



Typology 4 – Highway Verges and Roundabouts

Zoned Tasks	Zone	Definition	General Standard	Example
Grass cutting	2 – Amenity	General grass areas (including verges) that define pathways and ensure sites are accessible and suitable for recreational use	Up to 12 - 15 cuts per year (approx. every 3-4 weeks),	
	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Areas of long grass that run alongside the carriageway	1 or 2 cuts per year, timed according to species with arising removed or fly cut at the correct time	
Hedge maintenance	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Hedges bordering natural spaces shall not cause obstructions	1 cut per year during the winter programme	
Roundabouts	Various	All roundabouts to be assessed and maintained to the appropriate schedule	Maintenance / Cuts will be dependent upon the scheme for each roundabout	

Typology 5 - Cemeteries and Churchyards

Zoned Tasks	Zone	Definition	General Standard	Example
Grass cutting	2 - Amenity	Good quality grass areas surrounding important memorials and entrances to some churchyards	Up to 12 -15 cuts per year (approx. every 2-3 weeks)	
	3 – Low amenity (low maintenance)	Areas within cemeteries identified as biodiversity or wildlife habitats	1 or 2 cuts per year, timed according to species with arising removed or fly cut at the correct time	Example – Not Thurrock 
Hedge maintenance	2 - Amenity	Good quality hedge that denotes a boundary or previous screening	1 cut per year during the winter programme	
Shrub Maintenance	2 - Amenity	Shrubberies to be kept tidy and provide suitable backdrops to cemetery areas	Winter cultivation, pruning once per year, spot treat weeds up to three times per year	

Typology 6 – Outdoor Sports

Zoned Tasks	Task	Example
Bowling Greens	<p>Bowling greens require a significant range of tasks to be undertaken on a regular basis to uphold standards. These tasks include cylinder mowing, aeration using a range of solid, hollow, slit and sarrel tines; top dressing; over seeding; fertilising; rolling; scarification; verticutting; dragbrushing; irrigation; and the application of fungicides, worm suppressants, moss killers, insecticides and wetting agents.</p>	
Cricket Pitches	<p>Outfields will generally require regular mowing, aeration and marking out. The maintenance regime required to uphold standards on cricket squares is more comprehensive and includes: cylinder mowing; marking out; selective herbicide and fertiliser application; scarification; solid tining; top dressing; irrigation; rolling; over seeding; renovation works; and the application of fungicides, worm suppressants, and moss killers.</p>	
Football & Rugby Pitches	<p>The maintenance of football and rugby pitches is significantly less complex than that of cricket squares and bowling greens. Regular tasks will include grass cutting; aeration using slit tines; marking out; application of fertiliser; application of herbicide; overseeding; and the forking and sanding of goal mouths.</p>	