

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE
5 March 2025**

Officer: Danny Powell – Acting Operations Manager

Report on the provision and maintenance of Football Pitches at Shrewsbury Town Council

Introduction

Shrewsbury Town Council provides football pitches across the Town for all age groups and genders. Apart from providing facilities, we also maintain pitches for Shropshire Council, Small Parish Councils and Schools (Secondary and Primary). At the beginning of the present football season this was 64 pitches we had an input into their maintenance. We are the largest provider/maintainer in Shrewsbury.

Locations

The Town Councils pitches can be found at:

Monkmoor Recreation Ground
Springfield Recreation Ground
Upton Lane Recreation Ground Monkmoor
Church Road Recreation Meole Village
Radbrook Road Recreation Ground
Shorncliffe Drive Copthorne
County Ground Frankwell
Pump Lane, Gains Park

Maintenance is carried out at:

Shrewsbury Sports Village
Shelton Cricket Ground
Meole Brace Secondary School
Priory School
Shrewsbury Academy
Belvidere School
6 Primary Schools
We have also carried out work for other Parish Councils.

Town Council sites which are free at the present time:

Kynaston Rd Rec Harlescott
Waincott Harlescott
Greenfields Rec
Boiler House Pitch (Helipad for Hospital) Copthorne

All these sites have either have a single football pitch or a number of different age size pitches at the same location. The range of pitches we mark out and maintain are:

5v5, 7v7, 9v9, Junior and Senior.

They are used by clubs playing in the Shropshire County League (Saturday), Shrewsbury Sunday League and Shrewsbury Junior Football League. We accommodate 50 plus junior teams and 5 adult teams across our sites. These teams mostly play at weekends with the odd midweek game once the lighter nights start.

The Effect of Climate Change

The change in climate is having an effect on the timing of pitch maintenance and the periods when games have to be postponed.

In the past, winters were colder but drier. This allowed us to carry out more aeration work throughout the winter months and postponements were normally because the pitch was frozen. The downside to this weather was that the grass plant became dormant, and the pitches became grassless by the Christmas period with little chance of regrowth.

The new weather patterns mean that we are now postponing games through waterlogged pitches (November onwards) and that our aeration programme is now tailored to the ground conditions. We are also having to use lighter machines which only give us shallow depth when aerating. The warmer climate does mean that the grass plant keeps growing for the majority of the year and the plant does help to remove moisture from the soil.

With the change in weather patterns, the need to carry out end of season renovation at the right time has never been more important. We need to over seed and renovate the pitches by the end of May. To not carry out these operations out by this date could mean that grass germination may fail, and the ground conditions are too firm for deep aeration to take place.

Once germination takes place, a minimum of 3 months is required for the grass plant to tiller and fill out. This gives the plant time to mature and root stronger. This period of time means that the pitches do not reopen till the first weekend in September.

Period of Pitch Usage

Town Council football pitches are available to use from the first weekend in September until the last weekend in April. This is an 8-month period or a 33-week season with a 2-week break at Christmas. To mark out and make the pitches usable during August would cause damage to the goal mouths as children on their school summer holidays would be using them daily. We took this decision after complaints we received, that the pitches were poor and clubs felt that they were not worth the hire fee.

The Football Association recommends that grass football pitches should only be used 3 times during a 7-day period. With the number of teams that are now using Town Council pitches in some cases we are having 3 games a day on a pitch. This amount of play is unsustainable, and the pitches are now starting to suffer. Grass coverage is reducing, water infiltration after rain is slowing down and our ability to maintain them is compromised because machinery cannot operate effectively on them.

Staff and Machinery

The Town Council have invested in some of the most modern and up to date machinery on the market. Robotic Marking System, Sand Bander, Verti Drain aerator etc. All machinery is fitted with turf tyres to cause as little damage to the turf as possible when carrying maintenance operations. We have experienced staff who want to provide the best facilities they can but at the present level of usage, are finding it difficult to achieve this.

We need to consider that 5 members of staff look after the Winter and Summer sports. In late April and through September winter and summer sports are all running at the same time. This number of fixtures puts undue pressure on the staff and the Team Manager became ill last year trying to prepare them all, as well as carrying out his other duties.

We are trying to ease this workload on the staff by, when possible, having as little overlap between winter and summer sports as possible. Football finishes at the end of April, Cricket starts the first weekend in May, Football starts First weekend in September, Cricket finishes the 3rd weekend. Apart from cricket and football, depending on when the school easter holidays fall. These staff will also be working on our school contracts, removing football posts and marking out athletic tracks and rounders pitches ready for the summer term.

Meeting with Shropshire FA

The Town Council held a meeting with the SFA last week. A wide range of topics were covered with their CEO. We explained that we are now at saturation point and cannot take any more teams playing on our facilities, which they can understand. We also talked about spreading junior teams kick off times to help with car parking issues.

Having fixed start and finish dates for season which will not be moved, they will talk to the league secretaries to stop teams calling games off unnecessarily.

There is an ongoing discussion around grassroots junior football and another pitch size being added. We explained that our facilities do not have the room to accommodate anymore pitches.

This was a productive meeting, and they understand the Town Councils position and that junior clubs if they wish to keep growing will need to look for other locations to play their fixtures.

Conclusion

The football season on Town Council pitches will run from the start of September to the end of April. The dates for the next 5 years will be included in this report. Maintenance operations will look at improving surface drainage to reduce the number of postponements each season. We will be working with SAHA football club to finish surfacing their car park. We will be attending the FA consultation on grass roots football. The Town Council will continue to maintain and provide facilities possible within our budgets.

Football Season Dates for next 5 years.

Season	Start Date	Finish Date
25/26	6 th /7 th September	25 th /26 th April
26/27	5 th /6 th September	24 th /25 th April
27/28	4 th /5 ^h September	29 th /30 th April
28/29	2 nd /3 rd September	28 th /29 th April
29/30	1 st /2 nd September	27 th /28 th April

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the contents of the report are noted