

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE
8 May 2024**

Officer: Danny Powell – Acting Operations Manager

**IMPACT OF WEATHER ON GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
OPERATIONS SPRING 2024**

Purpose

To report on how the Grounds Maintenance operations have been influenced by weather conditions during Spring 2024

Introduction

The first quarter of 2024 has seen the wettest conditions in the last thirty years and the eighth wettest in history. Since July 2023, five feet of water has fallen. The flood barriers have been erected five times and flood water has been in the Quarry and across the County Ground three times. On many of our sites we have had standing water in places where this has never happened before. Apart from the rain, it has also been a colder spring than normal. This wet weather has had an impact on our operational work, but the colder weather has kept the Spring bulbs flowering for longer.

Verge Mowing

Several verges were cut in February for the Queen's visit as these were on her route in and out of the Town. Since the beginning of April, we have had four machines out cutting for the majority of the time. In the first two weeks, they got stuck on numerous occasions and it was decided that because of the damage they were causing to the ground, mowing would stop for a few days.

Since they have started again the weather has improved and they have been out every working day. By the end of May, we should have cut the majority of the town once. Some areas have been missed because the ground is still too wet, but we hope to pick these up on the next cut. The grass is long in many areas and is taking longer to cut than normal and leaving a lot of arisings on the top. On the plus side, the colder weather is slowing grass growth down and we may have got another cut in before it flushes.

Tractor Mowing.

The large tractor and mower have been too heavy to use up until the last week in April when it got stuck on one school site and had to be recovered by another tractor. We found that the large open spaces and school mowing required carrying out so because of this we have had to use a smaller tractor and mower where the cutting unit was a third of the normal size we use.

We have now cut most sites, but it has taken longer. With the ground conditions improving, we have sent the large machine out and have cut all sites once.

Sports Fixtures

Football

The football season, after a request from the Sunday League, has been extended by one week to end on May 12. They will have played all their fixtures on Town Council pitches by this date. The Junior league has also been extended to May 12. End of season renovation will then start which includes overseeding, Earthquaking Aeration, Goal post take down and topdressing with sand to improve drainage.

Cricket

The whole cricket season has been moved back from 27 April to start on 4 May. This is going to extend the season to the 28 September. The consequences of this are that the end of season renovations will not start until October. By then the days and nights are cooler and grass seed germination takes longer. We have also experienced floods in late October which will wash the topdressing away. Finishing this late means that the Cricket and Football seasons will overlap by a month, causing extra work for the staff.

Bowls & Croquet

These have both started on time and are a month into their seasons.

Rounders

The first week was cancelled because of the wet conditions, but they have now played three weeks of their season.

Tennis

The grass tennis courts are now ready for use, about three weeks late because of the weather. Monkmoor Recreation Ground tarmac courts are open but do require power washing. A company has given us a price to carry out this work and we hope to have it carried out the week beginning 6 May.

Dingle, Castle, and Town Centre.

All have been kept to a high standard over the winter period. The spring bulbs have lasted well because of the cooler temperatures, the bulbs in the Dingle are now being removed because they have finished flowering. The Dingle flower beds require topping up with soil as they are now lower than the surrounding lawns. We have estimated that this will require about 12 tons of topsoil. We are in the process of purchasing this and the staff will incorporate this into the beds whilst doing the summer bedding. This summer the carpet bed at the Castle will have a D-Day theme. This has already been designed by the staff and the plant requirements and numbers worked out. The plants are now being grown at the nursery, ready to go out in June.

Nursery

Plant production of the summer bedding is progressing well. Many of the plant plugs have been delivered and potted up. We have grown a number of the summer bedding plants from seed this year to reduce our costs. We have been able to do this by using the propagation bench we built this winter.

Play Areas

All play areas are now open. A number across the town were closed because of waterlogging during the winter. Some have been topped up with wood chips and had general maintenance carried out.

Countryside Team

Tree work.

A full season of tree work has been completed including the removal of trees identified in the Ash Die back survey. Tree work for Shropshire Council and trees identified by the Town Council of requiring work are being actioned but at times the ground conditions have made this more difficult to complete. To replace trees that have been removed over forty trees have been planted across the Town.

ORB Beaver Project

There has been a lot of work carried out by the team, weekly site visits, repair of storm damage and Tree protection work.

General Work

All sites have been regularly checked, any damage or vandalism to steps, handrails or bridges has been repaired.

Bird Boxes.

These have been installed at Greenfields Recreation Ground, Raby Crescent Recreation Ground and Mousecroft Community Woodland.

Turf Tank Marker.

Training and Installation took place with one staff member who has now started training others. On some occasions two or more staff may be seen with the marker. The marker has so far been used to mark out the Rounders pitches at the County Ground, this took 20 minutes from start to finish to do four pitches and took three litres of paint. Previously this would have taken four hours and would have used 20-25 litres of paint.

They have also marked out a 100-meter - 8 lane running track, a 200-meter, 8 lane oval track, 4 Rounders pitches, Shot putt, Discus and Javelin at Belvidere Secondary School. In previous years, this took two staff four hours each but this year one staff member did it all in two hours. The amount of marking paint was reduced from sixty litres to ten litres. We have also been advised by Bowcom Line markers that changing to a white spray nozzle and using their paint will reduce paint usage again. They have supplied ten litres of their paint to try.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the contents of the report are noted