

Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining! – Silverdale Athletic FC (Newcastle Under Lyme).

One of the many challenges facing clubs that have requested Pitch Improvement Programme (PIP) visits, are sites with complex geological backgrounds and inherently poor soil and drainage characteristics. There are numerous areas of the Potteries for example, where the soils are often described as 'restored soils from opencast and quarry spoil'.

The Silverdale district of Newcastle Under Lyme is a very good example of this given that the Silverdale Colliery was established in the Kent's Lane area in the 1830's and remained operational until 1998. As a result of the Coalfield Regeneration Project and collaboration with Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council (NULBC) and Barratt Homes, plans were developed in 2011 to establish a Local Community Centre with provision for football pitches (11 v 11, 9 v 9 and a training area), at the Kents Road site. The condition of the site in 2011 is shown below.



Developing this site was extremely challenging - the site's historical function as a colliery presented a significant legacy. Primarily, there were old mineshafts directly beneath the pitches which had been capped by thick concrete slabs, and covered with several metres of heavy engineering clay.

In addition to this, the subsurface conditions were far from ideal, with no topsoil layer and very little subsoil present on the site of the pitches. This presented substantial problems with the construction of the pitches with the appropriate gradients to assist with natural drainage – as per Sport England guidelines. Turfdry, who were selected to undertake pitch construction, arranged to use excavated subsoil that was to be removed from the adjacent Barratt Homes development, incorporating it into the pitches instead. With the suitable subsoil layer created, Turfdry then imported some good quality topsoil ameliorated with sports sand to complete the upper soil profile.

The pitches were constructed in 2011 by Turfdry to a high specification which consisted of lateral geo-textile membrane drains at 2m centres. Following a 'growing in' period, the pitches were handed over to NBC in July 2012 (see below).

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For a number of reasons, it was not possible for the site to be handed over to the long term tenant (Silverdale Athletic FC), and due to budgetary constraints, the pitches were not maintained for 15 months.

The pitches were eventually brought into use in January 2014 but by May 2014 the club reported significant issues with the pitches and requested advice on how to address the problems. These were numerous ranging from poor pitch levels due to sunken drain lines, significant moss presence, an anaerobic soil profile, poor sward quality and high levels of weed presence.



As a result, an intensive renovation programme was instigated which consisted of a significant top dressing application to restore pitch levels and repair drain lines. A turf nutrition programme was developed supported by intensive deep and surface aeration. Regular weed control was undertaken and budgets allocated for subsequent years. All of the above developed by the FA Pitch Advisors.

By 2015, the pitches had improved significantly to the point where they were able to support 60/70 matches per season with minimal postponements. The club were now realising the benefits of

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pitches that were initially constructed to a high standard but highlight the significant pitfalls if drained pitches are not suitably maintained.

If we fast forward to 2020, the club have continued to progress to the point where they were nominated for the Staffordshire CFA Grounds Team of the Year Award. The blueprint set out following the numerous PIP visits continues to be followed within the inevitable budgetary constraints. Typically, between £10K - £15K is spent per year maintaining the 11 v 11, 9 v 9 pitches and a training area.

In terms of machinery, the club achieve a great deal with very limited mowing and aeration equipment. Mowing is undertaken with a Countax 25 50 ride on and any other 'in house' work is undertaken with a slitter and drag mat. Contractors are used to undertake key operations such as deep aeration, weed control and end of season renovation.

Throughout the very difficult winter of 2020, Kents Road was one of the very few sites in the area that was able to play on most weekends with minimal postponements. As in previous years, the aforementioned award was keenly contested. Ultimately, Silverdale Athletic FC's commitment and determination to pitch improvement resulted in receiving the Staffordshire FA 2020 Grounds Team award.

Andy / Kevin / Gareth,

Thank you and for the invaluable assistance and advice that you have given us – without this I am quite sure that we would have gone down many blind alleys and spent money that we could ill afford to waste.

As you know we took over a playing surface that we found very challenging, but by following the maintenance programme you have provided us with, we now have a playing surface we can all be proud of.

Once again many thanks.

Marko Djukic - Chairman, Silverdale Athletic Football Club

