

Cornwall Association of Cricket Groundskeepers' Annual Report.

A season of soaring costs and temperatures, culminating in a severe drought, made 2022 another challenging year for the volunteers who devote their time and effort to preparing, maintaining and renovating Cornwall's cricket grounds.

Many if not most met this challenge thanks to the backing of clubs and patrons who opted to dig into their funds, and pockets, to ensure that ever-rising bills for the necessary machinery, fuel, water, fertiliser, seed and loam could be afforded.

With peace in Ukraine not in sight, climate change in the shape of extreme weather patterns set to stay, and grass growing almost non-stop through the winter, our costs alas are only going to go up and up, with fuel and fertiliser the biggest worries.

Meanwhile, on a more mundane note, the ECB's criteria for pitch marks, which require panel umpires to pass judgement on the bounce, carry, seam and spin, continue to cause bemusement.

A simpler system, with marks out of 5 for pitch, square, outfield and facilities, might be more helpful and encouraging to groundskeepers. As an accredited ECB Premier League, we await a response from the ECB on that matter.

For the record 20 of the 22 grounds in the Cornwall League's top two divisions achieved CACO pitch marks of more than 70% (the ECB pass mark), with the average score being 76%. Penzance, Redruth, Werrington, Paul and Helston were rated at above 80%.

During the season concerns were raised about excessive turn for spinners at Cape Cornwall. CACG chairman Simon Johnson and West pitch adviser Jamie Stevens were invited by St Just CC to make an inspection.

This gave all present a chance to discuss the fundamentals, in particular, the importance of phased pre-season light, medium and heavy rolling; the need for effective watering and covering of pitches during long, dry spells, to ensure water penetrates deeper into the soil; brushing pitches, and not cutting too low, to ensure a clean, debris-free, playable surface.

Elsewhere CACG pitch advisers, whose prime purpose is to support and encourage clubs to do the right things at the right time, have noted and appreciated the investment and skilled efforts being made on grounds such as Ludgvan, Paul, Mullion, Constantine and Gerrans in the West, and Bude, Roche, St Stephen and South Petherwin in the East- to name but a few.

Saltash St Stephens and Newquay are not so fortunate. They are having to contend with issues beyond their control, neither owning nor managing their fields and current sub-standard facilities jointly being used by other sports and activities, plus members of the public with dogs.

As a condition of promotion to Division 3 East, Saltash St Stephens has been required by the League to improve its square, outfield and changing rooms. East pitch adviser Steve Fry, assisted by contractor Paul Cotton, set that process in motion in October with a full renovation of the square. We wish Saltash St Stephens well in its endeavours.

Due to the extra costs of journeys, and time pressures, the CACG has not held any spring or autumn training courses in the last 12 months, but we did receive a mid-season visit from South of England cricket pitch adviser Phil Jeggo. He appeared at Mount Ambrose to give an evening workshop to groundskeepers on the art of repairing worn pitch ends.

As in previous years, the CACG has opted to hold its 2023 AGM on Zoom, with the assistance of Michael Weeks. It takes place on Tuesday, March 21, starting at 7.30 pm. All groundskeepers and club officials will be welcome to click on the link. Further details are to be circulated in due course.

Signed: Robert Jobson (CACG Hon Sec), February 10, 2023.