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## CLAPHAM COMMON

Clapham Common Nov 2021.Docx

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03 August 2022

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**CLAPHAM COMMON**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes the 3<sup>rd</sup> in a series to be compiled between autumn 2021 and 2022. The site was examined on 5 July 2022. This was during a prolonged and unprecedentedly hot and dry period that had reduced growth of any kind to near zero.



**Figure 1-1 Approximate outline of Event area**

## 2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The effects on grass growth generally of the hot and dry conditions are very clear in the aerial photograph of the events area taken on the day of the site investigation and shown in Figure 2-1.



**Figure 2-1 Events area viewed from the south west**

It was reported that the mower normally used on the Common had been out of action for much of the year. Despite not having been mown, however, the Events area supported a generally very thin sward with up to 50 % or more of bare ground showing over much of this.



**Figure 2-2 Typical appearance of the Events area ground cover**

There was occasional evidence of structural placements during particular events but these were relatively few and always no more than a few square metres in area.





**Figure 2-3 Ground cover at a structure location on the Events site**

Ground cover towards the east of the Events site was particularly thin and the drain line that had been incorporated here was more prominent.



**Figure 2-4 Especially thin ground cover to the east and lines of drain installation**

Away from the Events area, it was noted that the football pitches supported swards that were considerably longer. This may be due primarily to the situation with the mower. The ryegrass-dominated sward also showed an abundance of the broad-leaved species, sorrel, in areas of high wear, chiefly goal mouths and centre circles.



**Figure 2-5 Areas of high football wear showing sorrel among ryegrass**



In contrast with these maintained areas, the 'unmown' parts of the park supported a more interesting and bio-diverse community of species interspersed with the mown footpaths.



**Figure 2-6 'Meadowland' vegetation**

Some areas similar to this meadowland vegetation had developed simply as a result of the failed mower although mowing of these was in progress on the day of the investigation.



**Figure 2-7 Mowing finally taking place on areas of much longer grass**

### 3 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made in my previous report concerning the relaxing of the mowing regime over the Event area may not have been implemented. Alternatively, growth generally over the area has been extremely slow resulting in the generally very low and thin sward.

I note there is a policy in place of applying no chemical products to the Common, including fertiliser. This would certainly impede growth, most particularly during the spring. It was reported, however, that regardless of what height the sward was at, football was played on a casual basis in all circumstances. In any event, the policy of allowing the sward to grow longer and which was outlined in my last report should be considered for environmental, aesthetic and economic reasons.

Somewhat ironically, those recommendations were followed elsewhere as a result of the non-functioning of the mower. I think those areas left to grow longer were very satisfactory and provide evidence of the merits of this approach which should be adopted more widely. I understand this is certainly the policy being adopted by other London parks, in particular the Royal parks and for exactly the reasons I have outlined.

Given the generally thin and infertile nature of the soil and the zero fertiliser input regime, consideration should be given to the types of grasses that are maintained over the area. Perennial ryegrass is not very tolerant of heat or drought and it requires a good deal of nutrient input to sustain a suitably vigorous rate of growth. Consideration should therefore be given to the wholesale conversion to a fescue-dominated seed mix. Fescues are tolerant of extremely dry and infertile conditions (they are natives of heath and duneland). They are also quick to establish, in the right conditions. Fescues, allowed to grow to the flowering stage, are also very attractive yet easy to walk through being of very narrow leaf width and low overall shoot height. The seed heads reach around 300 mm while the leaf base may not rise above around 50 mm.

The drawback with fescues is that they are not so tolerant of wear. They would not be suitable on the football pitches, for example, but, over the event area, the stresses are somewhat different and occur at different times of the year. The over-riding limiting factor on the Event area is clearly the low nutrient status and the extent of drought.

Another grass that has similarly low nutrient requirements and is tolerant of both heat and drought is smooth stalked meadow grass. This is also much more tolerant of wear than the fescues. Its establishment in the Event area, in mixture with fescues, is likely, therefore, to be very advantageous. SSMG requires high soil temperatures to achieve establishment but this should not be a problem until late September at least. The drawback with SSMG is its cost. It is significantly more expensive than perennial ryegrass. Once established, however, I am sure that SSMG would be ideally suited for the circumstances of the Event site.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Overseeding

#### Pre-seeding fertiliser

In circumstances where granular fertiliser applications are permitted, it would be normal to commence the over-seeding with a granular fertiliser application. Supply and evenly apply to the area 35 g/m<sup>2</sup> (350 kg/ha) of granular fertiliser with analysis of 10:15:10 or similar.

#### Seed selection

Our recommendation, under the circumstances, would be to use a mixture of species composition (by weight) as close as possible to that indicated in Table 4-1.

Smooth-stalked meadow-grass	Slender creeping red fescue	Strong creeping red fescue
40	30	30

Table 4-1 Seed species and percentage (by weight) of each within the mix

The cultivars of all three species should be suitable for sports turf. The seed mixture must comply with the minimum standards set out in the Seed Regulations at the time of sowing.

#### Quantities

The grass seed shall be obtained in sufficient quantities to deliver a rate of 50 g/m<sup>2</sup> (500 kg/ha) to the area.

#### Sowing

Sowing should be carried out during suitable conditions using a disc seeder suitable for the incorporation of seed directly into the sward. The total quantity of seed should be divided into thirds, each third being sown evenly in varying directions.

### 4.2 Aeration

The relief of compaction has stimulated growth in parts of the Events area as shown in Figure 4-1.



Figure 4-1 Tussocks of grass growth associated with individual points of verti-drain tine penetration near the entrance to the Events area



The verti-drain is undoubtedly the most effective means of relieving compaction in areas such as this. During the summer months, however, the ground may not be sufficiently penetrable with this machine until more moist conditions develop in the autumn. Treatment at that time, even if extensive over-seeding has been carried out, is therefore highly recommended.

An example machine is shown in Figure 4-2 of a verti-drain fitted with 12 mm solid tines. Note that 18 or 25 mm tines would be more appropriate in this situation and the machine should be set to maximum heave action to achieve the greatest compaction-relieving effect.



Figure 4-2 Verti drain with 12 mm tines

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Lodge", written over a white background.

Dr Tim Lodge  
Consultant



**Agrostis**  
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3 August 2022