

White Horse Contractors delivers new surface for Old Trafford

Lancashire County Cricket Club recently turned to White Horse Contractors Northern for the eight-week reconstruction of its world-class cricket ground, Old Trafford. White Horse Contractors Northern's expertise in both natural and artificial sports turf and its extensive experience providing solutions to specific drainage challenges meant it was the obvious choice for the project.

It was important to Lancashire County Cricket Club that the drainage of the ground was improved. However, it was also a key part of the specification that the resulting pitch would be sustainable: it would not require high levels of artificial irrigation or fertiliser to promote grass growth.

White Horse Contractors Northern's team understood this challenge and was able to deliver a solution to meet it. The entire reconstruction of the outfield involved lowering it by 400mm, removing 6000cubic metres of material and installing a new drainage system. This consisted of 3500 linear metres of pipework, including main drains with lateral drainage pipes at five-metre intervals.

A gravel carpet was installed and White Horse Contractors Northern imported a manufactured sand-based rootzone for the new outfield playing surface to a depth of 300mm. The rootzone is vital to ensuring the effective drainage of the ground as well as the promotion of grass growth whilst maintaining a stable and safe playing surface with consistent performance. Therefore White Horse Contractors Northern consulted with Lancashire County Cricket Club in order to develop and design the best rootzone formula.

A sand and compost mix was selected as the optimum blend for the Club's requirements. This was placed and levelled to final grade using specialist plant with laser levelling equipment. Finally White Horse Contractors Northern seeded the outfield at Old Trafford Cricket Ground with a carefully selected dwarf rye mix blended with new fine varieties of rye at the top end of the STRI list of grass seeds for sports fields.

First used as a cricket ground in 1856 and host to major international matches since 1864, Old Trafford is constructed on good sandy soil. However, prior to its reconstruction the ground has suffered slow drainage. This combined with the inclement weather of its north westerly location had resulted in delayed matches and cancellations thanks to excess surface water, causing a major issue for the club.

Jim Crabbe, Contracts Director at White Horse Contractors Northern said: "Until now, the only reconstruction work carried out on the ground was to repair a crater that a bombing raid in 1940 created. A refurbishment of the ground was called for to improve the playing conditions. A precedent for the benefits of land drainage improvements was previously set by Lord's Cricket Ground, something which Lancashire County Cricket Club wanted to benefit from too."

Once the seeding was complete a concert booking meant the White Horse team were requested to revisit the site in order to turf it, to ensure the ground would stand up to this immediate high capacity use. Some 16000sqm of turf was installed over the outfield over a two-week period.

The entire project needed to be delivered quickly in order to take advantage of the autumn growing season through the late summer months. Despite poor weather conditions throughout, thanks to a wet summer, White Horse Contractors Northern delivered the project to time and on budget.