

Amenity Forum Conference Review

The Groundsman
November 2013

Amenity Forum chair John Moverley takes a look at some of the Knowledge sharing opportunities at the organisation's national conference



The 2013 AMF Conference, held at Leicester City FC, attracted almost 180 delegates

This year's annual conference of the Amenity Forum, held at Leicester City FC, attracted almost 180 delegates, drawn from all parts of the sector. A range of top-quality speakers addressed issues of weed, pest and disease control with an emphasis on the practical implications of recent policy changes as well as the technical challenges of disease and invasive weeds, to name just two. The event also had exhibition stands from some 18 organisations, which were kept very busy answering questions throughout the event.

The programme included a presentation by Ed Mowe, who in the 2012/13 season received the npower Championship Groundsman of the Year award for the work undertaken by him and his team in providing excellent sports surfaces at Leicester City FC. He spoke to delegates pitch side highlighting the challenges and approach taken, especially in terms of weed and disease control.

Industry rapport

Geoff Webb, Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) CEO, took part in an afternoon panel session which also included Jim Croxton, CEO of BIGGA. Geoff emphasized his support for the work of the Amenity Forum and the importance of maintaining high standards in sports surfaces. He referred to education and skills as a priority and the IOG's commitment to developing minimum skills standards for volunteer groundstaff and continuing to raise turf management standards. He sought an integrated approach by all bodies involved, seeking to promote very best practice. The Question Time session on the subject of weed, pest and disease control, held at SALTEX in 2013, and hosted by the Amenity Forum, had proved very successful, an example of addressing solutions in an integrated way.

Jim Croxton provided some key statistics concerning the golf sector. A major independent

study had shown that the UK golf industry had a £5.2 bn economic impact and supported directly some 79,000 jobs. Key to this was the excellence of golf playing areas. Geoff, in questions indicated a similar impact from other sports. Jim also mentioned ongoing work with the Amenity Forum to develop best practice guides and improved information for greenkeepers. He sought to take this forward on a European scale in due course. Both BIGGA and the IOG agreed to develop discussions with the Amenity Forum on even closer working relationships.

DEFRA support

A personal message from Lord de Mauley, Under Secretary of State at DEFRA, was received by the conference. In it he stated 'the government understands and appreciates the economic value of the amenity sector and the contribution it makes to a safe and prosperous society'.

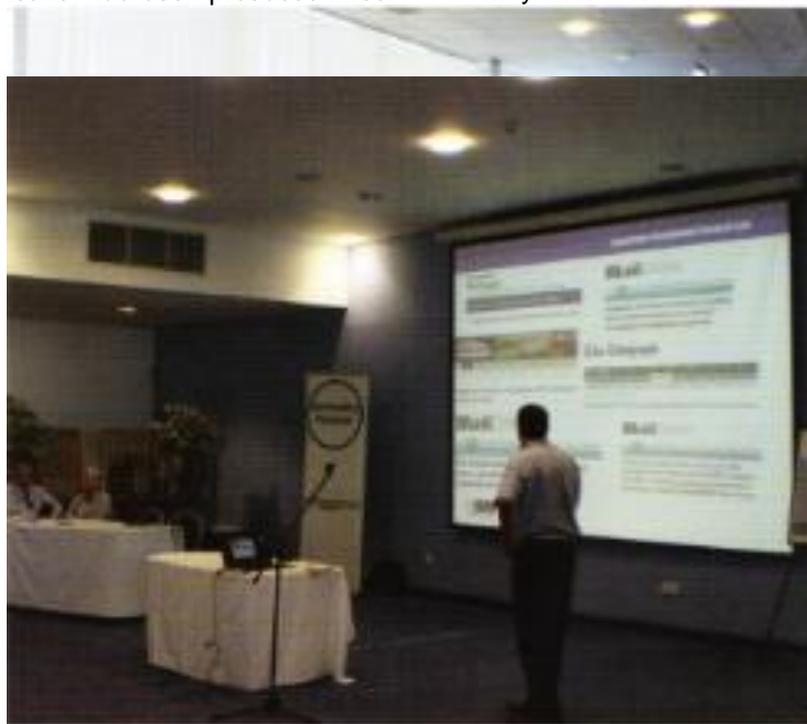
He expressed full support for the

work of the Amenity Forum in promoting best practice and seeking to continue to drive up standards across the sector. Following on, Paul Singleton, chair of the Forum's Education and Skills committee, presented encouraging statistics on the uptake of the Amenity Assured standard in the sector. This standard encompasses all elements of best practice.

Ten Golden Rules

The Forum launched a new initiative seeking to increase access to information about the sector. The initiative is being sponsored and as the title of Amenity Management Information or AMI for those who like acronyms. At the event, delegates also received a copy of a new leaflet entitled 'Pesticide use: Ten Golden Rules'. I explained that the leaflet had been produced in co-

operation with the Chemicals Regulations Directive, and established some basic rules. We wanted this to be distributed widely to all parts of the sector either as hard or electronic copy. Hopefully it would then encourage all involved to 'up their game', as needed and seek out further more detailed guidance. Copy of the Golden Rules and other guidance material is available at www.amenityforum.co.uk.



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Water quality

Another key topic for discussion was water quality. Jo Kennedy highlighted some of the key

issues and the role the sector can play in helping drive up standards. She welcomed the forum's involvement in ongoing consultations on the topic especially in the urban environment and close to water courses. Jodie Whitehead from Severn Trent stressed the need for a joined-up approach by all agencies and organisations involved. Operating at very best practice, when controlling weeds and diseases close to water courses, is clearly a key requirement. The conference also highlighted issues surrounding amateur use of pesticide products and the need to educate them fully, especially in terms of disposal of packages and indeed product.

In my concluding presentation, I stated that I felt much progress had been made especially in recent years. The forum now has almost 45 key organisations in membership. The large attendance at the conference indicated the strong desire by the sector to promote best practice on a voluntary basis and in genuine dialogue with policy makers and all involved. However, while it was good to see representation from most parts of the sector, we're concerned that there remained those still not fully aware of the recent changes. It was vital that the sector was not let down in its progress by not getting full engagement.

I urge those not currently in

membership to consider becoming so and, at the very least, register with the forum secretary to be on the general mailing list for information, including the half-yearly newsletter.

Further information on the conference with copies of presentations is available at the forum website and other information, including a video presentation, will also be available

www.afconference.co.uk.