

The Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) today made clear its serious concerns about any replacement of natural turf with artificial turf in professional sport.

IOG Chief Executive Geoff Webb stated: “Grass is the natural surface for our professional sports. It’s what players and fans want. Natural grass – properly maintained to governing body standards - provides the optimum playing surface today.

We recognise the improvements made with artificial playing surfaces, due to better technology. But even bigger strides have been made with grass. The standard of natural turf is a testament to the skill of the many dedicated, forward-thinking and experienced groundsmen; and they are strongly backed by a multi-million pound turf care industry that is the envy of the world. Together, this industry and the world’s best groundsmen are constantly improving and advancing the technologies and techniques needed to enhance playing surfaces.”

The IOG has a number of concerns:

[] That artificial turf should not be used as an excuse to save on maintenance or, indeed, to replace the need for a groundsman. The high maintenance needs of artificial surfaces must never be under-estimated. These are not ‘all weather surfaces’;

[] Some sports clubs’ interest in installing artificial surfaces is linked to driving commercial revenues, with real risk to playing quality and customer satisfaction. The emergence of artificial turf at grass roots level is also inextricably linked to significant cut backs and under-investment at a vast majority of pitches, most of which in football are in public sector ownership;

[] Maintenance is often under-promoted at grass roots level - and suffers from under-investment rather than being viewed as an essential aspect of a club’s budget;

[] With over 20,000 sites in England alone and an estimated 45,000 pitches, despite the grant

funding available there simply is not the budget for a wholesale replacement of natural grass with artificial turf.

The IOG stands by the standards of natural turf pitches at a professional level and the skill of the groundsman in producing top class playing surfaces, which are clear to see every week in various sports.

The UK has the world's most successful football league and natural turf surfaces combined with advances in technology contribute greatly to its success - as well as to the experience for both players and supporters alike. Any large scale introduction of artificial turf into competition will damage the games and sports we all love in Britain.

The IOG will take its case to the football and rugby authorities. IOG urges all sporting bodies to seriously re-think grounds policy - and place the right emphasis on the regular maintenance of natural turf pitches and grounds - for sport's sake.