

SUDS operation and maintenance - general

There are three categories on maintenance activities:

Regular maintenance consists of basic tasks done on a frequent and predictable schedule, including vegetation management, litter and debris removal, and inspections.

Occasional maintenance comprises tasks that are likely to be required periodically, but on a much less frequent and predictable basis than the routine tasks (sediment removal is an example). The table below summarises the likely maintenance activities required for each SUDS component and specific maintenance activities is given in the following sections.

Remedial maintenance comprises intermittent tasks that may be required to rectify faults associated with the system. Where remedial work is found to be necessary, it is likely to be due to site-specific characteristics or unforeseen events, and as such timings are difficult to predict. Remedial maintenance items can comprise items such as:

- inlet/outlet repairs
- erosion repairs
- reinstatement or realignment of edgings, barriers, rip-rap or other erosion control
- infiltration surface rehabilitation
- replacement of blocked filter fabrics
- construction stage sediment removal (although this activity should have been undertaken before the maintenance contract)
- system rehabilitation immediately following a pollution event.

O&M activity	SUDS component												
	Pond	Wetland	Detention basin	Infiltration basin	Soakaway	Infiltration trench	Filter trench	Modular storage	Pervious pavements	Swale/bioretention/greenroofs	Filter strip	Sand filter	Pre-treatment systems
Regular maintenance													
Inspection	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Litter/debris removal	■	■	■	■	□	■	■	□	■	■	■	■	■
Grass cutting	■	■	■	■	□	■	■	□	□	■	■	□	□
Wee/invasive plant control	□	□	□	□		□	□		□	□	□	□	□
Shrub management	□	□	□	□					□	□	□		□
Shoreline vegetation management	■	■	□										□
Aquatic vegetation management	■	■	□										□
Occasional maintenance													
Sediment management *	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Vegetation/plant replacement	□	□	□	□						□	□		□
Vacuum sweeping and brushing									■				
Remedial maintenance													
Structure rehabilitation/repair	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Infiltration surface reconditioning				□	□	□	□		□	□	□	□	

■ will be required

□ may be required

* sediment to be collected upstream of the main device

GENERAL MAINTENANCE

Litter/debris removal

This is an integral part of SUDS maintenance and reduces the risks of inlet and outlet blockages, retains amenity value and minimises pollution risks. High litter removal frequencies may be required at high profile commercial/retail parks where aesthetics are a major driver.

Grass cutting

It is recommended that grass cutting be minimised around SUDS facilities, apart from swales and filter strips and structural embankments where a height of 100–150 mm is recommended to prevent the plants falling over, or “lodging”, when water flows across the surface. In general, allowing grass to grow tends to enhance water quality performance. Short grass around a wet system such as pond or wetland provides an ideal habitat for nuisance species such as geese; allowing the grass to grow is an effective means of discouraging them. Grass around wet pond or wetland systems should not be cut to the edge of the permanent water. Grass cutting is an activity undertaken primarily to enhance the perceived aesthetics of the facility. The frequency of cutting will tend to depend on surrounding land uses, and public requirements. Therefore, grass cutting should be done as infrequently as possible, recognising the aesthetic concerns of local residents. However, grass around inlet and outlet infrastructure should be trimmed closely to reduce risks to system performance. If a manicured, parkland effect is required, then cutting will need to be undertaken more regularly than for meadow type grass areas, which aim to maximise habitat and biodiversity potential.

Weed/invasive plant control

Weeds are generally defined as vegetation types that are unwanted in a particular area. For SUDS, weeds are often alien or invasive species, which do not enhance the technical performance or aesthetic value of the system, or non-native species and the spread of which is undesirable. In some places, weeding has to be done by hand to prevent the destruction of surrounding vegetation (hand weeding should generally be required only during the first year, ie during plant establishment). However, over grassed surfaces, mowing can be an effective management measure. The use of herbicides and pesticides should be prohibited since they cause water quality deterioration. The use of fertilisers should also be limited or prohibited to minimise nutrient loadings which are damaging to water bodies.

Shrub management

Shrubs tend to be densely planted and are likely to require weeding at the base, especially during the first year to ensure that they get enough water. Shrubs should be selected so they can grow to their maximum natural height without pruning.

Aquatic/shoreline vegetation management

Aquatic plant aftercare in the first 1–3 years may be required to ensure establishment of planted vegetation and control nuisance weeds/invasive plants. Once established, the build-up of dead vegetation from previous seasons should be removed at convenient intervals to reduce organic silt accumulation (eg every three years and at the end of landscape contract periods).

Emergent vegetation may need to be harvested every 5–10 years to maintain flood attenuation volumes, optimise water quality treatment potential and ensure fresh growth, although this is often not required. Care should be taken to avoid nesting birds during the breeding season and to avoid great crested newt and water vole habitats. The typical window for this activity is towards the end of the growing season (September and October). As vegetation matures, plant height may also become a safety issue in residential areas.

Where emergent vegetation is managed, up to 25 per cent can be removed by cutting at 100 mm above soil level using shearing action machinery. Up to 25 per cent of submerged vegetation can be cut and raked out at any one time, using approved rakes, grabs or other techniques, depending on whether clay or waterproof membranes are present. Aquatic vegetation arisings should be stacked close to the water's edge for 48 hours to de-water and allow wildlife to return to the SUDS feature. They should then be removed to wildlife piles, compost heaps or off site before decomposition, rotting or damage to existing vegetation can occur.

Algae removal may be undertaken for aesthetic purposes during the first 3–5 years of a pond/wetland's life. The growth of algae, which is considered by some to be visually intrusive, is encouraged by nutrients introduced into the water body. This situation should settle down once upstream construction activities are complete.

Management of green waste

Appropriate methods should be implemented to dispose of green waste, including

- The development of wildlife piles
- On- or off-site composting
- Disposal to landfill

REMEDIAL MAINTENANCE

Structure rehabilitation/repair

There will come a time with most SUDS techniques when a major overhaul of the system is required to remove clogged filters, geotextiles, gravel etc. This will typically be between 10 and 25 years, depending on the technique and factors such as the type of catchment and sediment load. For example the use of geotextiles close to the surface in pervious surfaces traps the majority of sediment in a relatively easily accessible location. Reconstruction of the surface layer and bedding layer is all that is required, rather than reconstruction of the whole pavement depth.

Major overhaul is most likely to be required on techniques that rely on filtration through soils or aggregates, such as sand filters and infiltration devices. Other SUDS techniques are unlikely to need major overhaul if routine maintenance is undertaken as required (for example ponds and wetlands).

Rehabilitation activities for each SUDS component are described on the following tables.

Infiltration surface rehabilitation

In the event that grassed surface permeability has reduced, there are a number of landscape techniques that can be used to open the surface to encourage infiltration. Such activities are not commonplace and are likely to be required only in circumstances where silt has not been effectively managed upstream.

1. Scarifying to remove "thatch". Thatch is a tightly intermingled organic layer of dead and living shoots, stems and roots, developing between the zone of green vegetation and the soil surface. Scarifying with tractor-drawn or self-propelled equipment to a depth of at least 50 mm breaks up silt deposits, removes dead grass and other organic matter and relieves compaction of the soil surface.
2. Spiking or tining the soil, using aerating equipment to encourage water percolation. This is particularly effective if followed by top dressing with a medium to fine sand, and is best undertaken when the soil is moist. Spiking or tining with tractor drawn or self-propelled equipment penetrates and perforates soil layers to a depth of at least 100 mm (at 100 mm centres) and allows the entry of air, water, nutrients and top dressing materials.
3. As a last resort, it may be necessary to remove and replace the grass and topsoil by:
 - removing accumulated silt and (subject to a toxicity test) applying to land or dispose of to landfill
 - removing damaged turf which should be composted
 - cultivating remaining topsoil to required levels
 - re turfing (using turf of a quality and appearance to match existing) or reseeded (to BS 7370: Part 3, Clause 12.6 (BSI, 1991) using seed to match existing turf) area to required levels. It may be necessary to supply and fix fully biodegradable coir blanket to protect seeded soil. Turf and seeded areas should be top dressed with fine sieved topsoil to BS 3882 (BSI, 1994) to achieve final design levels. Watering will be required to promote successful germination and/or establishment.

Soakaway operation and maintenance

Maintenance schedule	Required action	Frequency
Regular maintenance	Remove sediment and debris from pre-treatment devices and floor of inspection tube or chamber.	Annually
	Cleaning of gutters and any filters on downpipes.	Annually
	Trimming any roots that may be causing blockages	Annually (or as required)
Occasional maintenance	-	-
Remedial actions	Reconstruct soakaway and/or replace or clean void fill, if performance deteriorates or failure occurs.	As required
	Replacement of clogged geotextile	As required
Monitoring	Inspect silt traps and note rate of sediment accumulation.	Monthly in the first year and then annually.
	Check soakaway to ensure emptying is occurring.	Annually

Maintenance will usually be carried out manually, although a suction tanker can be used for sediment/debris removal for large systems or in public environments.

Pervious pavement operation and maintenance

Maintenance schedule	Required action	Frequency
Regular maintenance	Brushing and vacuuming.	Three times/year at end of winter, mid-summer, after autumn leaf fall, or as required based on site-specific observations of clogging or manufacturers' recommendations.
Occasional maintenance	Stabilise and mow contributing and adjacent areas.	As required
	Removal of weed.	As required
Remedial actions	Remediate any landscaping which, through vegetation maintenance or soil slip, has been raised to within 50 mm of the level of the paving.	As required
	Remedial work to any depressions, rutting and cracked or broken blocks considered detrimental to the structural performance or a hazard to users.	As required
	Rehabilitation of surface and upper sub-structure.	As required (if infiltration performance is reduced as a result of significant clogging).
Monitoring	Initial inspection.	Monthly for 3 months after installation.
	Inspect for evidence of poor operation and/or weed growth. If required take remedial action.	3-monthly, 48 h after large storms.
	Inspect silt accumulation rates and establish appropriate brushing frequencies.	Annually
	Monitor inspection chambers.	Annually