

2015

GOG MAGOG SITE
VISIT REPORT:
Wandlebury Course



HAWTREE LIMITED

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We refer to a one day site visit conducted by Martin Hawtree and assisted by Christine Fraser on the Wandlebury Course, on Thursday May 7th 2015. A brief introductory meeting to detail concerns and expectations was attended by Kevin Mader (Secretary), Stephen Lang (Member of Management Council), and Andrew Howarth (Estate Manager). The subsequent morning and afternoon was spent conducting an on-course hole-by-hole investigation examination of problems and potentials.

General Notes

After inspection of the whole golf course, an appreciation of the overall member impressions, the style, and characteristics of Wandlebury were gained. Wandlebury's SSSI management practises are commendable, even more so considering the additional extent to which these standards are upheld beyond legal requirement. The ad-hoc rough management program adds great interest and distinction to the Wandlebury Course, whilst enhancing the course's challenges.

A few general concerns remained with us throughout the on course examination. We can simplify this in terms of the openness and width of fairways. The shortness of the par 5s which may be regarded as weak and undemanding for the lower handicappers are in contrast to the exciting and challenging set of par 3s. The deep and small Wandlebury bunkers provide a nice distinction from the Old Course, although some fairway bunkers felt slightly out of scale being unusually large and long. The main issues seemed to be the failure of fairway bunkers, 20 years on, to challenge the low handicapper and a general impression of the greenside bunkers being remote from the green edge. This last impression may not contain the whole truth about how the bunkers actually function and gather, and whether or not the surrounds and swales and banks provide as much if not more challenge for the low handicapper who just misses the green and who tends in any case to have quite high skills of bunker play and recovery. In various instances the green surface itself feels small and unproportioned to the commanding earthworks that surround it. This arises from the greens being originally designed without collar or apron with the expectation of the surface being larger and in consequence that much closer to the bunkers and surrounding contours. We would urge consideration of revising the collar both in terms of its width (recognising that the maintenance burden will increase by moving to a simplex width) and position, a little further out where feasible.

It is very interesting to note that during a recent plus handicap event, only 5% of players returned a score under par. After observing the general openness, absence of scratch bunkering, and the shortness of the par 5s, such a result maybe puzzling but testifies to the strength and demands of the putting surfaces, the surrounding contours banks and rolls beside the greens, and quite possibly the effects of the wind. We suggest that there needs to be choice about which new fairway bunkers should be introduced at the scratch marker's length; this to be guided by competition and tournament scores. Some adjustment to existing fairway bunkers will be needed where new bunkers are introduced. We well remember many championship courses 'collecting' a new fairway bunker every time there was a significant advance in hitting distances with the result that strings of bunkers started to appear. And that needs to be avoided.

Herewith our hole-by-hole notes on the opportunities for and constraints on the development of the Wandlebury Holes:

Hole 1: 513y Par 5 S.I. 9

It is generally regarded as preferable to begin the round with an opening hole that is forgiving, to allow the player to get on course quickly. The fairway averages 40 yards in width and this has been standard throughout the course. The width was adopted at the beginning because of a need to feel the golf course 'occupying' a very large, open, windswept area which made up the new land. It was always understood that the fairways would narrow in time pari passu with the development of trees and their effect on breaking up the site. That time has probably arrived. Any reduction of width should not be done simply by bringing in the semi-rough and rough three or four yards on either side but on the basis of a fairway-by-fairway examination in relation to the planting structure, bunkering and angle of approach into the green.

There is room to lengthen the hole 6-8 yards by extending the white tee deck back, but the volume of material needed is significant and the 18th fairway becomes the more exposed the further back the tee is taken. The right fairway bunker is functionally weak, set wide on the right-hand side and almost out of view from the right side of tees. The bunker is quite short, even with an uphill drive. A second bunker might be added 20 yards further on, and slightly tighter to the line.

Although the third shot is the most demanding of the hole, the greenside bunker is too far away from the green edge; may be pushed two yards closer. Hawtree had previously considered softening contouring on the approach and whilst the present contouring offers a valuable form of defence some softening would remove the present slightly jarring appearance. For further interest, consider an additional left side fairway bunker approximately 100 yards short of the green, ensuring it is visible from the drive landing area.

Hole 2: 385y Par 4 S.I. 13

There is potential to gain extra length by extending the white tee deck back, which may require some shrub clearance. It should be remembered that this planting was introduced partly to protect the tee from the Old Course and additional planting further back would be required before considering such a move. Even with the additional yardage the fairway bunkers are easily carried by the scratch player. However, the arrangement of the bunkers is attractive and balanced and should probably be retained.

An attempt was made to discourage long drives straight over left fairway bunker by crowding the rough without effect. We would alternatively narrow the fairway at 275 yards and break up the ground levels in the left-hand rough and semi-rough.

The greenside bunkers are too far away from the putting surface to produce much tension in the approach shot to the green. They can be moved closer to the green but the bunker on the right is not easy to move without significant earthwork.

Hole 3: 451y Par 4 S.I. 3

Although the fairway bunkers are 50 yards short of where the scratch player is landing, a demanding hole nonetheless. Most often produces a double bogey, or worse. The challenging drive must find the fairway to enable the player to accurately reach the green two. To the extent that the hole is very demanding for the player who most likely finds one of the bunkers there could be an argument for an additional bunker further on set at a certain width to give pause for thought to the long player: to risk the bunker to get a shorter second shot to the green. One or both the present bunkers might be removed and the ground left as broken ground in rough.

Again, the greenside bunkers could be closer to the putting surface.

Hole 4: 509y Par 5 S.I. 11

Overall, the hole is open and rather short for a par 5 of today. The shortness is accentuated by the prevailing wind and downhill drive. This hole tends to produce the most number of eagles and birdies from all tees. The conversion of the 10th Old white tees into 4th Wandlebury white tees would add length and produce a more demanding fairway bunker for the scratch player. Although it might also introduce some slight conflict between the two courses and require a large amount of material to build, this is preferable over advancing the existing

fairway bunker due to visibility concerns. Alternatively, see the effects of playing the hole in competitions slightly forward as a par 4.

Hole 5: 182y Par 3 S.I. 17

We find a potential white tee location back and right of existing red tee just within the tree line. This relocation would require some tree removal/transplant. Although a much different and more interesting angle into the green, would produce a maximum length of 170y. This location would also eliminate the downslope run on issue described below. The newly located white tee would have to be elevated 1-1.5 metres to retain visibility.

Concern remains that on the left side of the green well struck shots fractionally short may hit the downslope beyond the front bunker and run through the back of the green and down the slope. The difficulty of finding a left-side pin position is accentuated for shorter hitters who require low trajectory woods to reach the green. To alleviate this issue, stagger the current uniformity of the bunker separation to create one larger 6-8 yard gap through which balls can run onto the green.

Hole 6: 403y Par 4 S.I. 7

There is ample room to lengthen the hole by pushing a white tee back 20-25 yards if visibility of the right-hand bunker mounds can be sacrificed. The fairway is excessively wide and could stand to be reduced by a few metres on either side, beyond the landing area in particular. But should probably remain wide if the white tee were indeed to be moved back, as is preferred.

To improve the visibility of the fairway bunkers, enlarge and heighten the sand face. The front left approach bunker is 15 yards short and well left of the green, but gathers a good many balls from players running their shot round the left-hand slope into the green. However, this defence is not affecting longer hitters who may require the challenge of a second bunker much tighter to the green and a little further along the green edge.

Hole 7: 373y Par 4 S.I. 1

There is plenty room to push the tees back to gain length. This par 4 is stroke index 1, uphill, and into the wind, but yet plays relatively easy. The hole has lost some of its teeth. Originally a drive bunker set well left needed to be skirted to find the approach into the full length of the green and avoid the approach bunkers. Now, modern hitting distances will only be challenged by the green's narrowness and contouring. It has been suggested to transplant two copper beach trees into the elbow to better define and strengthen the dogleg. Ideally the number of trees transplanted should increase to three or five so that the inner trees, which would be too dominant in years to come can be removed to leave the outer trees to do the same job and grow into mature specimens.

The left fairway bunkers are distanced correctly, but are now too far left and out of play (due to lack of dogleg). The first left bunker is too large and out of scale with the rest of the Wandlebury bunkering. The approach bunker 50 yards short of the green has lost much of its purpose due to the length of modern hitting distances. The bunker is easily flown by the longer hitters, and is only disturbing the shorter hitters who must run their second shot into the green. Greenside bunkers are positioned well.

There is an awkward and evident sunken apron surrounding the green surface that should be re-graded in order to create a more natural movement and eliminate the possibility of funnelling balls around the green.

Hole 8: 212y Par 3 S.I. 15

The hole is developing well with the right balance of tree frame and views beyond. Improvement could be made to the greenside bunker to produce a much more visually prominent object from the tee. Enlarge the bunker, tighten to the green edge, soften the wavy star-like outline, and lower the ridge to embolden and increase the gather.



Hole 9: 384y Par 4 S.I. 5

To gain an additional yardage, the white tee could certainly stand to be pushed back towards the 11th tee complex. Subsequently, isolate and contain the tee complex by shielding the white tee of the 11th, which as the player walks back to the 9th tees from the 8th green feels rather like a back 9th tee. A series of plantings could be beneficial in forming a shield that bars and conceals access to the 11th tee deck beyond.

If the right fairway bunker was re-located 25-30 yards further on in an existing natural hollow, it would better challenge the low handicapper. The right greenside bunker is too far away from the green and does not produce much pressure in the approach. Also, the ridge in front of the bunker eliminates its ability to gather shots.

Hole 10: 434y Par 4 S.I. 12

There is space to lengthen the hole by 15 yards with a new back tee, which would require elevating by approximately one metre for adequate visibility. The present fairway bunkers are only partially visible from the tee. They would have greater function if they demanded a carry of 260 yards or more from present white tee or 275 yards from your suggested new tee. There is a large protruding mound attached to the left fairway bunker which should be removed and softened to encourage gather.

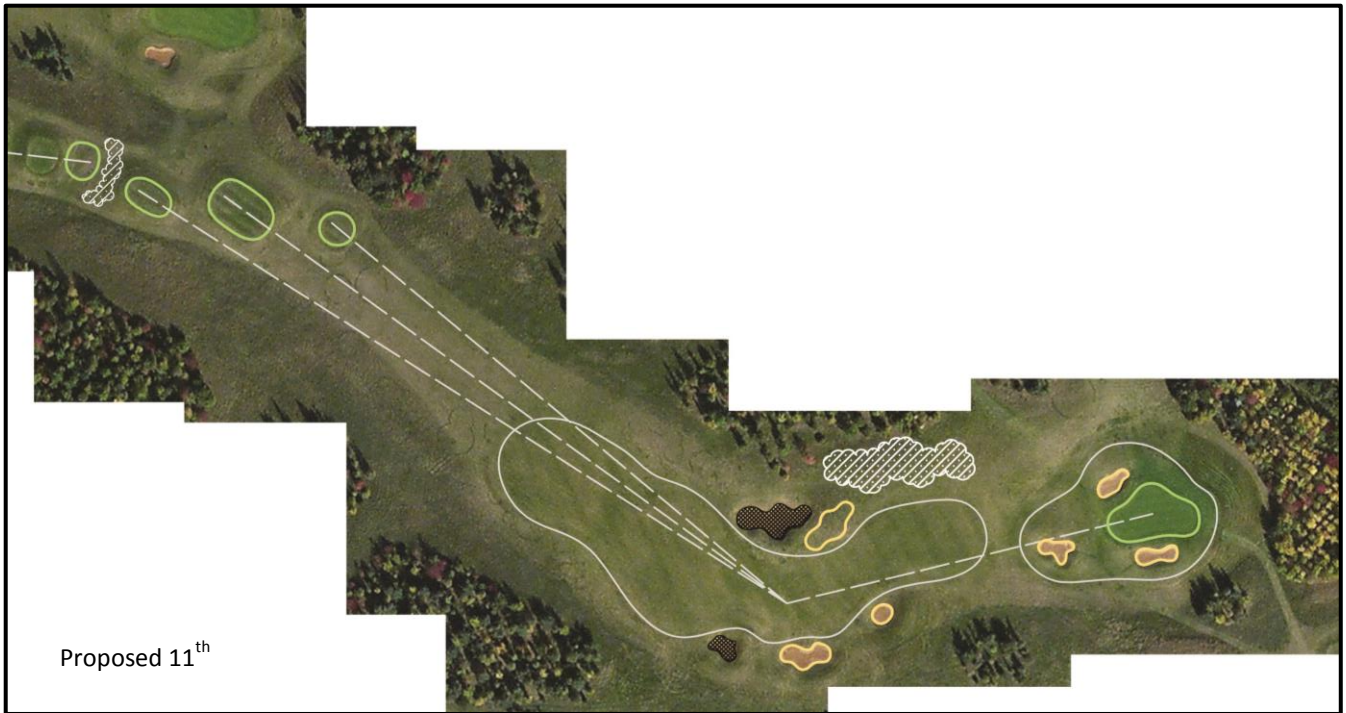
There is an opportunity to create additional interest in the green by integrating the existing hollow at the back right into the putting surface.

Hole 11: 395y Par 4 S.I. 8

There is plenty of room to move the white tee 40 yards to the right. Although this is a preferable angle, the hole's visibility would be greatly compromised. The bunkering on the right side of the fairway would be particularly obscured, and would require a large cut into the hillside to expose them.

The drive is straightforward and poses little risk as players may easily fly the left side fairway bunker and shorten the dogleg. Move the left side fairway bunker 20 yards further beyond its current location, angle it at 45 degrees to the fairway as opposed to existing 90 degrees, soften the indentations in bunker edge, decrease the size and deepen the floor. Introduce a series of plantings beyond the revised left fairway bunker just outside of the fairway edge to enhance and strengthen dogleg. The first right side fairway bunker is not visible from the tee: decommission and leave as a grassy hollow

Overall, the green complex is solid.



Hole 12: 527y Par 5 S.I. 2

In terms of stroke index, the 12th is the second indexed hole on the golf course. However, this rating is unreflective of the quite low average scores. The fairway is wide and without much interest between drive bunker and approach. The left fairway bunker is slightly out of position and does not gather running balls; lower ridge in front and expand collecting contours. Pushing the white tee back and right 20 yards or so (which seems quite feasible) will increase the hole's length and place the fairway bunker back into a commanding location. However it might be preferable to split the bunker in two and form the two in echelon. The large bunker once again may feel a little out of scale with the bunkers further along the hole.

The approach shot bunker poses not much threat to the long player. Depending on the eventual arrangement of the approach and greenside bunkers the two staggered bunkers might be on the left or the right side of the fairway. In an attempt to invoke a strategic thought process on the approach, a 'flecheron' series of bunkers might be introduced as shown in the diagram below. Allow a generous work area when constructing these bunkers as it presents an opportunity to sculpt and contour the surrounding fairway for interest. Such a bunker arrangement would remove the need for the present echelon on the right of the approach and green and probably only one bunker tucked into the side of the green is really needed. The entrance to the green should not be more than 10 yards wide.

Certainly grass the far right greenside bunker as it is too far away from the green and hidden from view. Relocate the middle bunker closer to the green, and expand the putting surface to the edge of the existing apron where effective. For further interest, manipulate the fairway edge inward in certain areas on the basis of its relation to the bunkering, angle of approach, and overall strategy of the hole.



Hole 13: 310y Par 4 S.I. 16

Potential for an interesting back tee location on top of the existing mound back and left of the present tee complex.

The first right side fairway bunker might be better placed beyond the next bunker to form a slightly different trio formation.

Hole 14: 149y Par 3 S.I. 18

Although the shortest in length of the par 3s, and with the highest stroke index, the 14th is a challenging hole. It would be worthwhile to take advantage of available room for lengthening the back tee 20 yards or so.

Greenside bunkers could be edged a little closer to the green.

Hole 15: 498y Par 5 S.I. 4

The strategy of the hole is arguably compromised by the extensive width and lack of risk in the landing area; but it is blind from the tee with no clear indication of how the hole is going to shape up when standing on the tee. The fairway waist might be narrowed by a few metres on each side to challenge those who attempt to cut the corner, but possibly only for major events. Alternatively, during tournament play bring the tees forward and play as a par 4.

The green feels unbalanced in relation to the surrounding earthworks; expand the putting surface to the existing apron edge. Both of the left greenside bunkers could be edged closer to the green.

Hole 16: 187 Par 3 S.I. 14

To enhance the strength and interest of the hole, introduce a tee deck right of the 15th green which will require a 200 yard shot. This was always the original idea for the hole which we believe was changed out of fear for pulled shots from the adjacent Old Course hole. A temporary tee should be tested for health and safety before any more permanent move for the white tee.

The 16th is another strong par 3. Expand the putting surface where possible to increase the pinable area.

Hole 17: 359y Par 4 S.I. 10

Leapfrog the first right side fairway bunker beyond the second bunker to a more effective location in which to challenge the longer player.

Expand the putting surface where it is feasible to revise the collar/apron.

Hole 18: 464y Par 4 S.I. 6

Although the 18th is downhill with a generous fairway, it plays as a long and challenging hole with a demanding drive.

The approach bunker should be enlarged and re-contoured to increase its gathering potential.

The green complex is unbalanced and seems too small and out of scale with the surrounding banks. Expand the putting surface to the current apron edge on the right side in particular and revise the apron. The contouring on the right side of the approach green should be altered to cradle and hold wayward balls rather than deflect towards the 1st tees.

Thank you for your kind hospitality and a thoroughly enjoyable day spent on the Wandlebury Course. I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Best Regards,

Martin Hawtree

Hawtree Limited, 2015