

22 04 2019

Harpenden Common MANCO Report: April 2019

Dear General Manager

Please find below my April report for Harpenden Common:

Golf Course

It's been a busy period on the golf course since my last report. March is all about renovations and then April provides the recovery period. At the same time the team are finishing off snag jobs carried over from the winter. Course presentation also comes to the forefront now with the playing season looming. It is sometimes quite challenging to work out the priority for jobs; this is where I work closely with Sean and Olly, looking at the jobs on a daily basis to achieve a balance between renovations, project work and course playability.

April has been a funny month so far. I was driving around the Chalfont area on Monday the 15th of April and the roads were being gritted! I have been looking at some weather data for the area and in the first part of April (up until the 15th) we have only had 50% growing days. This is frustrating as recovery work obviously relies on the plant growing to get the surface back on track. The low temperatures combined with the lack of rain (to wash the sand in) mean that areas such as greens and approaches have taken a little while longer than expected to recover.

The good news is that temperatures over the Easter weekend have been excellent, but with no rain the surfaces are very dry and the soil is quickly losing its winter moisture. Sean has been watering the greens, tees and approaches over the weekend. This is not for agronomic benefit but to improve the playability. There is plenty of moisture in the soil but at this time of year with chilly mornings and wind during the day, the top millimetres of the soil can dry out and become very crusty.

On to the playing areas! The team worked on the **greens** during the third week of March, deep-tining and heavily sanding them. They gave a granular feed to the sand-based greens in the jockey field as well as the weaker common greens such as 2, 4 and 11. The work went very well and I congratulate the greenstaff on the high standard of the operation. The tining pattern was especially impressive and all in all it was a very successful greens renovation week.

Recovery has been a bit slow due to the weather conditions but I think we are back on track now. Some of the common greens have slightly poor density but over the course of the next few weeks these will evolve and the sward will tighten up. Height of cut is now set at 3mm (was at 5.5mm in December) and we are aiming to produce a daily green speed of 9.5 to 10.5 feet. Sean and the team are stimping early every morning in order to make management decisions about adjustments required to consistently meet this target.

The tees are looking very good; we have worked hard on them over the winter and early spring period. Last month they were hollow-cored, sanded and overseeded. They have also been given monthly shots of fertiliser to encourage early spring growth and improve density in the surface. We

are currently watering the tees on a daily basis to encourage the seed uptake and fertility. I worry about the jockey field though with its limited water supply.

Approaches are really starting to come alive since we reduced the height of cut from 11mm to their current height of 6mm. They are starting to tighten up and bring a new look to the golf course. Tight approaches, collars and run-offs are bringing a new dimension to the game i.e. the chip and run. Some golfers feel that this is making the game easier but I disagree. With a tighter approach you have variation to shot making. Instead of just reaching for the sand wedge (as you do with fluffy approaches) you now can chip and putt, putt or still play the float shot. With these choices comes indecision over which shot to play and we know that golfers don't like indecision!



We have worked hard on the **fairways** since my involvement with the club began. To date they have been deep tined and scarified; selected areas have been hollow-cored and

seeded; they have been fertilised using both foliar and granular feed and now you are on to cutting. There is not much else that you can do! We are now at the mercy of the weather gods with their limited irrigation. On the whole I feel that they are doing okay and far better than other clubs in the area. There are still some weak fairways such as the 3rd, but it will take time and some growing weather for the fairways to fully recover from the hot and dry summer of 2018.

The **surrounds** are the last area to be worked on this spring. Our plan is to hollow core, overseed and fertilise these areas but time has beaten us for now. The work has now been rescheduled for the end of April after the Easter period.

Irrigation

Good progress has been made with the irrigation set-up at the club. Since the beginning of the year many greens' sprinkler heads have been raised and levelled to improve performance. The system has been audited and the current data is now with the software company, to be checked against the historic database. The tanks and pumps are ordered and many decoders have been changed to make sure that the system is working electronically. This is good work and the goal is to get the system ready for the start of May.

We have postponed the remainder of the sprinkler levelling work until next winter. Two thirds of the course has been completed (well done Sam and the team) leaving only the jockey field to be done after the season. The tank and pumps will be installed at the end of Easter and the repair/servicing work will continue throughout the spring and summer. The feedback I've had so far with the system is that you have minimal leaks through the pipework and the cabling network seems okay. This is all positive and with some good maintenance over the next 3 to 5 years I believe that we can get this system up-to-scratch.

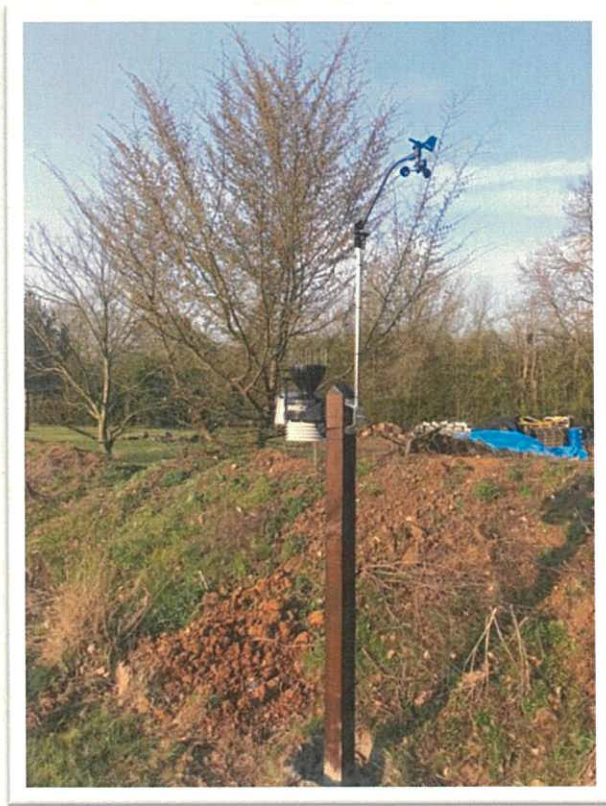
The guys did the sprinkler work on the 2nd surround at the start of the month and it went very well. They worked with the irrigation contractor SJS to install two dedicated sprinklers on the left side of the 2nd surround. This means that the greens' heads in this area can be used solely on the green leaving

two heads dedicated for the surround. Now that we know that this can be done, we will look to install further surround heads over the coming years.

Weekend Work

We want to have a weekend assistant come in over the playing season to support the full timers. This has become popular at many of my clubs and allows for higher presentation at the weekends without a huge strain on the budget. Currently the club only have two full-time staff working at the weekends. All that can be done in the season is greens cutting and course set up (rake greensides and divot/move markers). With an extra assistant we will also be able to change holes on a Sunday plus either roll the greens on the Saturday (if they need to be sped up) or cut the approaches. Sean and Olly are currently looking for someone to begin by the start of May.

Weather Station and Data



The weather station is up and running. This seems like a simple piece of equipment but it is so important if we are to maximise the greens potential this year. A weather station gives daily evapotranspiration losses, plus any moisture gained through rainfall. It also gives daily temperature readings so that we can monitor things such as nutrient status in the plant. Over the last decade a weather station has become a crucial part in a maintenance set up. It is as important as a greens mower in my opinion, giving you the information upon which to make management decisions.

This ties in with the sprinkler work that the team have been doing and forms part of our data programme. We are measuring moisture status in the greens on a daily basis and collecting performance data such as stimp readings. It will allow me to assess the greens remotely as I have access to the team's irrigation computer. This all forms part of the package to get the best out of the playing surfaces at Harpenden Common.

Regards

Greg Evans