



Head Greenkeepers Report

August 2020

Since taking over the role of Head Greenkeeper we have gone from a drought to summer flooding to a Winter of endless rain and now the COVID-19 pandemic and another wet Summer. I dread to think what 2021 will throw at us!

The club's decision to keep the Greens team at full strength during the lockdown has proven to be a great one. I know there were financial implications to this, but I feel it has been a decision that has paid off with the course being in great condition from the resumption of play whilst also attracting numerous new members. I also must thank the guys in my team Bryn, Lewis, Ian and Frank for wanting to continue though the crisis ensuring that the standards we have set over recent years were upheld. With it being difficult to find experienced greenkeepers we are lucky to have such a good team which will only improve as Ian and Lewis further grow into their roles as they gain experience.



As we entered the lock down period, we scarified the greens with the Sisis TM1000 to a depth of 15mm and Verti-cut to a depth of -3mm then applied 300kg of Symbio's Green circle (a cocktail of beneficial soil bacteria and fungi). A double pass of the Vredo drilled 60kg of Browntop Bent into the greens which was followed with a 10t 45 grade sand dressing.



Pic – Bent grass seed germinating on the 5th green.

This was an interesting experiment as we had never cold seeded before. With no play imminent and greens growth at a minimum it gave us the option to relax the maintenance programme on the greens and allow the seed to germinate and establish. When seeding during the growing season we see germination between 5-7 days, in March it took 23 days, but it eventually established well into the sward. The percentage of bent grass in our greens continues to increase which shows that we are creating the right conditions for it to thrive and compete.

We experienced a strange Spring with warm days, very little rain and frosty nights. Uniform growth on the greens was not seen until the end of May. Greens were spoon fed with liquid ammonium sulphate, bio-stimulants and our plant growth regulator programme was started earlier than usual to maintain turf health and minimise growth during lockdown in case it was necessary for the course to be left unmaintained for a period as the crisis deepened.



Pics – hard frosts right up to mid-May and drought stressed fairway at the same time

An organic 8-0-6 SSD fertiliser was applied in mid May to give the greens a gentle push, it was around now we started our compost tea programme as well tank mixing it with yucca extract, fulvic and humic acids and marmite. Soil conditions became very dry with the lack of rain fall so we moved from our winter penetrant applications to our wetting agent programme with monthly applications of Revolution from early April. Cutting heights through lockdown were maintained at 5mm and were gradually cut down to the current 3.5mm as play resumed. Greens are currently being cut around 5-6 times per week and ironed 3-4 time. Since the early spring drought where we were extremely close to running out of water, rainfall totals have been high especially lately with 118mm recorded in the past week. This again brought up the shortfalls of the push up greens 7,11,15,16 and 17. With a solid clay base and no drainage these greens drain poorly and will not sustain quality surfaces under this kind of pressure. The greens team over recent years have improved them massively through cultural practices but I feel that we cannot take them much further without installing an extensive drainage system or reconstructing to USGA specification. It costs approximately £20,000 to rebuild a green to USGA specification as we have done at 2,3,5,8,9,12 and front of 18th.

The aeration programme has consisted of weekly passes with the sorrel roller or star slitter supplemented with monthly 10mm solid tines with a hired in Toro Procore 648. When money is available in the machinery budget, we will be looking to purchase our own unit to further increase our aeration programme and also incorporate tees and approaches in it. We again loaned the Air2G2 from Sandwell Park G.C in July and did a total of 3 passes of the greens at a depth of 300mm blasting compressed air to aerate, de-compact and improve drainage. This machine will be returning in mid September to continue this work. Full depth was achieved on all greens except the practice putting green where we continually hit a hard pan layer at 200mm which explains why the drainage of the green is poor and leads me to believe that there is a construction issue that needs investigating. Last year with organic matter levels and rooting depth improved we increased our deep aeration (verti-draining) programme. In August we hired the Wiedenmann GXi8 using 19mm tines to a depth of 250mm, we then did 12mm solid tine passes to 200mm deep through the Autumn and Winter whenever it was possible to borrow a machine. This work has seen further improved rooting under the greens which was evident during the Spring drought when the greens required less water and less

labour-intensive hand watering than they would have historically. The improvements in O.M levels, sward composition and root depth are very encouraging, but we still have a way to go to make them fully sustainable. Although cancelling maintenance week 2020 will slow progress we need to ensure that progress continues next season.



In addition to the above, the summer maintenance programme has seen the greens spoon fed with Symbio's 20-0-10 liquid tank mixed with our Molasses carbon rich based Boost product, chelated irons, seaweed and trace element packages. Light sand dressings every 3 weeks of 6-7 tons have been made with nearly 70 ton applied to date. We will not hit our goal of 140 tons without maintenance week. We have also made use of a supply of out of date beer from the bar, this has been diluted and sprayed onto the greens as the sugars and yeast it contains are a great food source for the soil biology, which in turn will provide nutrition for the grass plant.

Pic – Air2G2 aerating the 12th green

Tee and Approach maintenance has consisted of an application of Rigby Taylors 11-5-10 +9Fe Cold Start to initiate Spring growth and help to repair the Winter damage and remove any moss that had crept in with the wet weather. A full divot using a dwarf rye and fescue mix and re-root followed. 8 weeks later an app of Rigby Taylors 22-5-6 SK with added seaweed, magnesium and calcium 5-6-month slow release fertiliser was applied to provide the main feed for the growing season.

A plant growth regulator programme was started in May applying monthly applications of 1.2l Primo Maxx, 20l Go Green select Iron and 12.5kg Soluble Ammonium Sulphate to aid turf density, root development and regulate water usage. An over seed again using the dwarf rye and fescue mix was made using the Vredo applying 40kg of seed. An application of selective herbicide was made to remove any weeds from the surfaces. We have been using 1 ton of divot mix per week to just to keep up with the damage from play. I feel that the tees are in the best condition I have seen, however, some like the 7th and medal tees on 8 and 13 have been sited and constructed so poorly that they are difficult to improve and simply mowing them causes damage as the machine has to turn on the tee top as the banks are so severe and impossible to access with maintenance machinery.



Pic- 10th tee shining in the spring sunshine

We also still have tees with no irrigation and others where it is installed but with poor coverage such as 3,4,8,13,14,15,16,17 and 18. To further improve the tees a programme of tee levelling, draining and installing irrigation as well as increasing inputs by initiating a wetting agent programme, top dressing programme and increasing the over seeding programme. At present our budget does not support this as it would cost approximately £5,000 per annum extra. The tee extensions on 4 and 16 have struggled as the cold dry Spring gave us very poor germination after the initial seeding. We have been over seeding with the Vredo and applied Symbio's Caviar and 15-2-15 to get the soil life working and help the new sward to thicken and fill in. The 4th is progressing well, however 16 is struggling due to a lack of sunlight as it is shaded by mature surrounding trees. When we have had dry spells, it is evident that we still have extensive tree removal to carry out as areas of turf invaded by tree roots turned brown and lost density as they were out competed for water. Tees suffering from root invasion are 1,2,3,5,7,8,11,12,13,15,16, and 17.



Pic- 13th yellow tee struggling due to surrounding mature trees

A big issue for us since the revocation of the chemical Carbendazim has been worm casting problems. The worm secretes a sticky substance into the cast which smears it as the mower's rollers or golfers' trollies and buggies go over. This creates a wet slippery surface open to weed invasion. It is imperative that all fine turf areas receive full sunlight and good air movement as worms thrive in wet shaded conditions. The Winter programme will again concentrate on providing this with more chainsaw work.



Pic- Worm casts already spoiling teeing areas and 3rd green with severe shade from trees

Our ageing irrigation system has been giving us problems this season with 13 leaks found on pressurising the system after the winter drain down.

Stuart Mason
Head Greenkeeper