**Communications Forum Held at WGC Clubhouse Thursday 9 December 2021**

Rosemary Nicholson (RN), Chairman, opened the meeting and introduced the Directors: Peter Bentley (Pres), Duncan Syers (DSy), Peter Bryant (PB), John Davis (JD), Paul Waterhouse. The Ladies’ Captain, Sue Smith, was also present and attends Board meetings.

**Catering Update by the President, Peter Bentley.** A working group had been set up immediately it was clear Darren Senior (Moor Catering) was leaving WGC. The group included Peter Mason (PM) Gen. Mgr., Kevin Atha and Philip Roberts (co-opted members of WGC with professional background in catering) and the President. From 7 applications, 4 had been chosen for interview. The working group was unanimous in its recommendation to the Board that Callum Airey be appointed as the new caterer at WGC. Final dotting of the Is and crossing of the Ts of a new franchise agreement was in hand and a more detailed announcement would be forthcoming soon.

**Finance and GMG Presentation by Duncan Syers, F.D.** - Duncan said he joined the Board around the same time as the General Manager, PM – January/February 2020 – and the attraction for both was the club’s objective to operate more as a business and improve efficiency in decision making. The General Management Group (GMG) was set up to allow the Gen. Mgr. to do his job with improved efficiency and sets out a structure to give the Gen. Mgr. parameters within which to do his job. The parameters did not hand over responsibility from the Board to Gen. Mgr. but gave latitude to run the club on a day-to-day basis. The GMG Business Plan gives the Gen. Mgr. the framework. GMG Terms of Reference set out which decisions must come to the Board, e.g., Capital Expenditure, Policies, Strategy, and employment of senior staff. The GMG Business Plan and TOR were available to read on the club website. DSy said the two Directors on GMG alongside the Gen. Mgr. were Paul Waterhouse and himself. DSy said the GMG Directors were not sat in a back room somewhere but were out front assisting the Gen. Mgr. to do his job. DSy said Working Groups were set up, as required, and replaced the previously known sub-committees.

**Strategy presentation by Paul Waterhouse**, chairman of the strategy working group. Paul said that the most important part of any strategy was that which related to the members. The 2021 members’ survey was positive across all areas, and nothing had shown up that required immediate attention. Top of the priority list from the survey was the clubhouse. Also, sustainability will be part of the strategic thinking going forward as a way to get the course back into action quicker following any future floods. PW said members feedback is important. Peter Clinker offered to assist the working group in respect of sustainability.

**Presentation of Operations Expenditure and Capital Expenditure at WGC by Duncan Syers.**

A printed handout had been made available. DSy said it was a live document and was always presented to the Board at each board meeting and updated accordingly. The cash remaining at the end of October 2021 was extensive due, in part, to being cautious regarding expenditure. We also benefitted from government grants, including rates relief and furlough monies and we took out a bounce back loan. The net cashflow figure was what was left after operations expenditure to fund debt repayment and capex projects. DSy said there was a small amount of HP left to pay off – borrowing money was not part of the finance strategy moving forward. DSy said taking the bounce back loan was a bit of an easy decision as cheap interest over a 5-year repayment terms. The member loan had been agreed with the club to be repaid by January 2026. Whatever is left can be spent on course improvements. DSy said a plant replacement programme was in place with machinery examined each year and useful life determined and updated which meant the numbers could be +/- in any year. DSy said the irrigation system was 50 years old and apart from age didn’t reach certain areas of the golf course. Expenditure in 2021 had been approved by the Board to replace pipework and extend the existing system. PB said that parts of the existing system were non-functioning due to underground damage caused by rabbits and other damaged pipework. PB said the upgrade would enable x4 sprinklers to work instead of maximum x2 at present which would negate hand watering (labour saving) exercises which were a loss of time to greens staff working on the course. This would be possible once the pump room was upgraded which was a separate contract, that ideally would be undertaken in March 2022. DSy said questions had been received about the size of the expenditure. DSy said the first Phase spend was within the 10% of previous year’s subs, as allowed by the Articles and that the extra spend shown for 2022 would be put to the AGM in March to vote upon. DSy said the paths project had been completed for 2021 and had come in £5,000 less than budgeted. DSy said the amount shown against clubhouse had not been approved by the Board but that a plan existed and the clubhouse working group was forecasting a total spend of £150,000 over 3 years. This is a moving feast but would have to be brought to members via the AGM or an EGM to seek approval.

**Presentation by Peter Bentley, President - Clubhouse refurbishment.**

There was a requirement to refurbish the clubhouse which was prioritised by the recent members’ survey. The new bar had been completed in March 2020 along with an upgrade to electrical, fire and emergency systems to comply with legal requirements. Pres said the clubhouse had never been off the agenda and a new working group would be established immediately to work up the outline plan which Pres summarised to include Linton Room, Entrance lobby, Meeting Room, Dining Room, Lounge Bar, and 19th. He hoped that a worked up detailed plan with costs would be available for members’ comment by end February to early March with a view to work commencing autumn 2022.

RN informed members the presentations were concluded, and questions sent to the Board in advance would now be answered in the order received whilst acknowledging that a reasonable number might have been answered during the Directors’ presentations.

**Peter Clinker** – PC asked about “sensible use of phones” in the clubhouse in connection to the response answering the members’ survey. PC asked what the age profile of members was who had responded to the survey. PC said he wasn’t specifically asking because of mobile phones alone but thought it might help the club to understand the makeup of members asking the questions such as mobile phone use and how members should be answered. RN said the work to pull out age profiles was lengthy, and time hadn’t allowed for this to happen. PC also asked how funds were approved and managed. DSy answered and said Gen Mgr. does the ground work, produces a paper for the Board, and when expenditure approved the Gen. Mgr. oversees the contract. PC asked if competition pricing and assessing quality of work were conducted and he was assured this is how the contracts were managed. PC asked about sustainability and if the golf club was moving towards establishing this a part of the strategic conversations ongoing. He said it could bring advantages from a publicity point of view and was also a route to good practice. PC said he was available to offer his assistance on the subject of sustainability. PC also offered to assist on the Strategy Working Group. PB said sustainability was really important in his view, too. PB told the meeting the club was moving to establish x2 new tree nurseries, was looking at electric buggies and also how to include sustainability in its estate management plan. Pres said there was no sustainability plan for the clubhouse but as PC had volunteered to join the new clubhouse working group then he saw this as being built into the club refurbishment plan. Trish Bell asked if any of the work conducted by Pip Pearson’s project group 2+ years ago was going to be of use/used. Pres said he had it in mind to take a lead from this work.

**Brian Marsden** – On behalf of the WAGGS group, he said he understood the Board had not been aware the current caterer was unhappy and intended to resign. If true, this was alarming and presented a problem. He thought a Director should have contact with the Caterer as well as the Gen. Mgr. He said other clubs have gained and lost caterers and we were lucky to have had DS and also lucky to secure a replacement. RN responded by saying during lockdown in 2020 and 2021 the only person DS had to talk to and be supported by was PM. RN said Pres had been told about DS unhappiness but there was no urgency expressed to deal with it. RN said to suddenly find DS was resigning was a great shock to her as it was to everyone else. RN said that she and PB (Director and impartial) had interviewed DS at the time and offered him the opportunity to sit down with them and PM to discuss and resolve but DS refused. RN said she felt WGC would never really understand DS reason for leaving. Kathy Page asked whether a team was coming in with Callum. RN said HR law meant DS was honour bound to take his staff with him or make them redundant but with WGC on the cusp of signing up the replacement chef this would give staff the chance to stay at WGC if they wished to apply to the new caterer. Tony Dyer asked about notice that Callum needed to give his current employer - one month. Peter Clinker asked what notice period was in the new agreement and it was confirmed at 4 months. RN said joint advertising (bar and kitchen) and use of multifunctional skilled staff was the way PM wanted hospitality function delivered in the future.

**Terry Nicholson** – He had completed a quick dip sample of golf clubs in the country and found 5 who had a strategy in place. He was hopeful a strategy would be put in place for WGC soon and if this is the objective of the Board, when might his happen? PW said during 2022 but couldn’t give an exact month. TN said club needed to move forward. PW agreed and reaffirmed it would be available in 2022. TN said he and others recognised the benefits that had occurred on the course but what responsibilities do the Directors have compared to GMG/Gen. Mgr.? DSy replied and said the Board was acting as a Board and not meeting to deal with small issues where everyone had a view, and no decisions were taken. Now, the Board was informed each month via a comprehensive report from GMG (originated by Gen. Mgr.) to the Board which informed Directors about what was going on. This prompted vigorous debate at Board meetings which gave the Directors comfort the correct decisions were being made. DSy said it would be wrong for any member to think the Board doesn’t get involved. Simply put the Board dealt with the big issues and involved itself in more focused debate to arrive at decisions to be made/taken. TN said previously sub-committees were the responsibility of a GC director and was this still the case? DSy said no it was not. Working groups replaced sub-committees. TN asked who the working groups reported - the GMG.

**Graham Beales** – said he felt there was a perceived lack of communication to members. RN said there were considerable amounts of communication being issued all of the time such as newsletters, and Board minutes. GB said he wasn’t aware of this communication being available or having read that much in the newsletters. Trish Bell said she thought this arena (Forum) was great and should remain a constant, but she thought communication could be improved too. RN suggested that, going forward, we could precis the GMG report and put a link to it in a newsletter which might encourage members to be specific about the communication they wished to read over.

**Kevin Murtha** – Who is on the working groups and how are people chosen to be on them? RN pointed him to the handout given to attendees at the meeting which listed the current Working Groups and who was on them. RN said that members volunteered to help, and comms had gone out from the club asking for volunteers with little response, quoting marketing as one area of specialisation asked for in the past. RN went on to say that new members were asked about professional background and whether joining members would be available to join working groups if upcoming projects could use their skills. RN said members need to let the club know what they can do and are available to get involved. Tony Page then spoke about how he had become involved with greens (and still was involved) and also with handicaps and competitions. He put himself forward and was contributing in a positive way and was involved. JD rhetorically asked how happy was the Board? JD said he wanted to let members know that after many years of serving on GC and sub committees that he was better informed now than ever before. He wanted to give members his reassurance that Directors had sight of the important things at the club that Directors should be aware of. JD said this was due to the GM having more responsibility than any GM that had gone before him (PM).

**Dennis Skinner** – said devolving responsibility to the GM/PM (the best GM WGC has had) was the best decision the club had taken. What he wanted to know was if the Board was actively recruiting for new Board directors in anticipation of the next AGM? RN said it would be great if we could have members coming forward with the right business skills and specialisations the club required but this was unlikely. Board was actively looking for new directors with general business experience and the working groups would take volunteer members with appropriate skills on projects as required. RN said that two members had already approached the Board and named one who was at the Forum, Graeme Macfarlane. RN confirmed the directors staying on the Board were DSy, PW and herself.

**Bruno** **Chorzelewski** – who prepares the GMG report? RN said the GMG (PM, DSy, PW) submitted 4 days ahead of a Board meeting to the Directors.

**Terry Nicholson** – who does the Greens Working Group report to. DSy responded it was the GMG. PB said the GWG provided a supporting role for GMG and the Board for projects and costs associated with the projects. DSy said he and PB had had discussions at the outset (2020) about how things would work with Greens and that the GMG hadn’t quite worked as intended in connection with Greens. DSy said there has been a perception of a closed shop but reality was quite the reverse, and the Board was continually active. Doug Howell said his experience with Greens in the past centred around what to do and how to do it. PB said that over the last two years Darren Morris, Course Manager, had been allowed to get on with the job rather than be pushed and pulled by others telling him how to do the job. This has given him and the team confidence to show exactly how good they are and how able they are to conduct the work at WGC.

**Graham Beales** – asked about the 18th fairway and what was happening about it given the upcoming England Golf events at WGC in 2023 and 2024? PB gave a potted history of the 18th and work to date in 2017 being washed away. In the time left and budget available the fairway had only 2” of top soil instead of 5”, soil had to be taken from the course and ballast had to be used which was not of decent quality. As a result, a treatment programme to put nutrients into the ballast should have been started but wasn’t and nothing was done on 18th until 2020. This had caused root depth issues and water getting away from the surface of the fairway. Verti-draining had been tried but wasn’t going to solve the problem and new draining required to clear up the mess. Initial advisory cost for 2022 was in region of £25k with the proviso that work is undertaken late spring/early summer – which was in the heart of the active playing season. Peter Clinker asked if any comeback on the architect or contractors, but PB said no. The storm did the damage and destroyed the intended finish.

The meeting closed at 2010h.