

Ground Report May 2020

Impact of Flooding Events

A new drain linking the new water hazard at the dogleg on the 13th hole with the existing pond closer to the tee, was laid during the weekend of the 16th May.

We are still awaiting suitable conditions to undertake a visual flow test to check that the outlet drain flap valve is seating properly and preventing back feed from the River on to the course via the 16th pond. A visual inspection of the valve will be undertaken before the end of May, whilst river levels remain low

Due to the exceptionally dry conditions since the beginning of April, and the settled forecast for the next 4 weeks the control valve on the main outlet drain has been closed to preserve as much moisture on the course as possible.

Coronavirus Restrictions – Course Set Up

In anticipation of coronavirus restrictions being lifted, in part, the course has been set up to comply with social distancing guidelines recommended by the R&A / England Golf.

Gwynn Davies, STRI, has provided us with advice on minimum treatment regimes, whilst the course has been out of play – see summary of his guidance.

Works completed this month

Despite the course being temporarily closed due to Coronavirus restrictions the Ground staff have continued to work, ensuring the course is in excellent condition now that play has resumed.

Greens:

Generally, cutting once per week, by hand at a higher cut height whilst the course has been out of play. The frequency will be increased now the course has been returned into play.

No ironing whilst the course has been out of play.

Hole changed once per week now the course has been returned into play.

Treatment: The early Spring conditioning programme has now been completed.

Regular tining and top dressing with sand will continue when weather conditions permit.

No condition issues.

Tees:

Cutting generally, once per week at a higher cut height, whilst the course has been out of play. The frequency may have to be increased now the course has been returned into play.

Top dressing has been applied as part of the early Spring conditioning programme.

Fertiliser will now be applied w/c 18th May followed by hand watering.

No condition issues.

Fairways:

Cutting generally, once per week at a higher cut height, whilst the course has been out of play. The frequency may have to be increased now the course has been returned into play.

Fine Turf completed Phase 2 work on the fairways during April. This consisted of

verti-draining all fairways and over-seeding areas damaged by last year's floods. The fairways are now dry and in good condition. Unfortunately, the exceptional and continuing dry weather has slowed the germination of the re-seeded areas on the 13th, 17th and 18th holes. To promote growth as much of these areas as possible will be watered by the Ground staff by connecting temporary hoses / sprinklers to the irrigation system.

Rough:

Cutting generally, once per week at a higher cut height, whilst the course has been out of play. The frequency may have to be increased now the course has been returned into play.

No treatment this month.

No condition / length issues.

Bunkers:

Now the course has been returned into play bunkers will be raked twice per week.

All bunkers have been re-edged.

Most bunkers have been affected by foot traffic from the general public, whilst the course was out of use. It is hoped that this problem will reduce significantly now the course has re-opened.

Practice Areas:

Cutting generally, once per week at a higher cut height, whilst the course has been out of play

No treatment this month.

Further work will be undertaken on the practice bunkers as they have suffered badly from foot traffic from the general public, whilst the course was out of use.

Other Areas / Clubhouse grounds

Strimming of re-growth of nettles/weeds around the base of trees, hedges and along buggy paths will be undertaken, as and when resources permit.

Work by the specialist Contractor to cut the grass slopes to the riverbank and hedgerows remains stopped.

The Gardening Sub-committee have suspended bi-monthly meetings due to current restrictions. Dialogue on future plans is being maintained via "whatsapp."

It is hoped that the volunteer gardeners can shortly resume activities around the clubhouse, following social distancing guidelines and safe use of tools etc.

The toilet unit, adjacent to the 8th tee, remains off hire.

The new "Blue Course" holes remained in play prior to playing restrictions coming into force. Discussions are on-going with Marketing on how best to promote the use of the short course as a means of attracting new members and in particular juniors.

STRI Recommendations & Maintenance Weeks:

This year's annual inspection was to be split into 2 visits. The first visit due on Tuesday 24th March, 1100hrs was cancelled due to Coronavirus restrictions.

Restrictions permitting, the second visit will still take place in early Summer to check that greens, tees and fairways are in optimum condition.

Schedule of Major Competitions in April / May:

All cancelled.

Machinery update:

No major machinery repairs were required in April early May. However, the loss of power problem with John Deere tractor, used to cut the rough, has yet to be fully investigated / resolved. A major / expensive engine overhaul may still be required, or as the machine is very old, a second-hand replacement may be the better long-term option.

Capital issues: Potential replacement for the John Deere tractor as above.

Tree work update

No significant damage to trees occurred in April / early May. Proactive tree management by the ground staff continued in April. We are still awaiting confirmation from the National Grid when they intend to fell trees (21 in total) across the course from the 16th tee to the 13th tee to safeguard the integrity of their overhead lines. Unfortunately, our request for the trees to receive a 40% crown lowering and delay the final felling to approximately 2030 to reduce the visual impact has not been accepted.

The removal of the diseased trees within the copse to the left-hand side of the 17th fairway, which is to form part of the compensation package has also been deferred to this year, as has the trimming of a number of trees affecting the playability of the 6th, 13th, 14th and 18th holes (to prevent damage to the course from vehicle movements).

An outline plan to soften the visual / noise impact of the loss of trees along this corridor is being developed by Bidy Schilizzi. The proposals also aim to enhance the natural habitat of this area and around the new ponds. Funding of the proposals has yet to be agreed.

Health & Safety update:

There were no reportable H&S incidents or ground staff “near misses” in April or early May.

The 2020 Ground H&S Planner has been updated to reflect the status of the Alan B. Partnership audit report conducted on Tuesday 21st January 2020, and includes scheduled dates for workplace observations. The Planner has been issued to Chris Barraclough. Team talk dates will be agreed once current coronavirus restrictions have been lifted.

Replacement / new H&S signs still need to be procured and installed.

2020/21 Winter Project update:

The major element of the 2020/21 Winter Project programme is likely to be the construction of a new buggy path between the 8th and 9th tees, across the extended pond.

2020/21 Grounds Budget Update:

A draft Ground budget for 2020 / 21 has been prepared and submitted to the Board for approval.

Course Drainage

Subject to available funding the completion of remaining Phase 3 scope (drainage

improvements) and Phase 4 (jetting of key elements of our existing drainage system) will take place during the August maintenance week, or late September / early October.

Ground Committee Meeting update:

Currently all Ground meetings and “look and see” course inspections are cancelled, due to coronavirus restrictions. However, regular dialogue is being maintained between the Ground committee and ground staff.

Minimum Treatment Regime during Coronavirus restrictions as recommended by Gwynn Davies (STRI)

Further to last night’s events and the request for some advice on managing the course under minimal inputs, please see below:

<https://bit.ly/2WzZhuo> is the link to a recent article I wrote on the subject.

In response to actual measures to take place here are some generic ideas that can be tailored to suit your requirements:

Raise the current Height of cut on ALL surfaces by up to 25% to help the turf cope better on its own. Bigger leaves will function better.

Look to use fewer machines to carry out mowing – fairway mower to cut approaches and tees where possible too?

Block cut everything including greens for improved efficiency and reduce time – presentation standards should not apply now.

Identify areas that can be left unmanaged – this may become a permanent feature that helps with cost realignment.

Reduce fertiliser & water inputs so that exaggerated growth is minimised which also reduces the need for mowing because the plant is not growing as quickly. Disease risk is reduced too.

Consider using preventative fungicides, PGR (plant growth regulator) on playing surfaces in accordance with budgets. *****APPLY AT MANUFACTURERS LABEL RATES****

Reduce the frequency of cut on all surfaces – 3 times a week for greens, 1 cut on tees, fairways, approaches. This is dependent on strength of growth!

Utilise the additional time to carry out aeration work, topdressing, overseeding, divotting fairways depending on budgets. Whilst there is no foot traffic on the course, there is a window of opportunity to improve the agronomics of the course (seed will be allowed to establish and improve the long-term quality)

Performance standards will need to be relaxed – there is no requirements for fast smooth greens currently. The aim is for healthy turf across the whole course.

When the time comes to reinstate play – be mindful of reducing cutting heights down gradually, do not overfeed or overwater.

Consider realigning future overall expectations for the course and assess the impact of these measures on the long-term maintenance plan.

Hopefully this has offered some food for thought and as mentioned I would be happy to discuss them further at any time should you wish to.