

Ground Report November 2019

Winter rules covering fairways, rough and bunkers, and use of mats have been introduced.

Although some of the earth mounds placed by the EA in the wooded area at the elbow of the 6th have now been removed GUR remains in place, as denoted by the white line.

All penalty areas are marked with red stakes.

Impact of Flooding Events – Current Status

A third flooding event occurred at the end of September.

Although ground conditions were wet and river levels higher than average, it became evident that following the September flood areas of the course were not draining as quickly as normal. To speed up drainage a number of grips were dug by the Ground staff across the 17th and 18th holes to take standing water into the pond adjacent to the 16th tee. A number of pumps were hired to pump water from the pond directly into the River Mersey.

In parallel, investigations commenced to locate the problem causing the repeat flooding of the 13th, 17th and 18th fairways after heavy rain. Three potential causes were identified:

- a) There were blockages in the drainage system caused by silt / debris deposited from the July floods.
- b) The flap valve on our outlet drainage pipe discharging water from the 16th pond into the River Mersey was jammed by river debris allowing flow from Mersey to back feed down the pipe and on to the course during high river levels.
- c) There was a blockage in our drainage pipe discharging from the 16th pond into the River Mersey, preventing the course from free draining when river levels were low.

A number of checks were undertaken by the Ground staff of the drainage system and some blockages have been found and are being cleared. The flap valve was also inspected and cleared of debris during a period when the level in the Mersey was low.

A specialist Contractor was brought in to investigate the condition of the outlet drainage pipe, inserting a jetter both from the pond end and also from the River Mersey. A significant blockage was located closer to the River Mersey and beneath the temporary working area the Highways Agency (HA) and their Contractor are using to carry out repairs to the M60 structures as they cross the Mersey.

Subsequently contact was made with the HA and they have agreed to carry out further investigations to locate the blockage and repair the drain, although at this stage they have not admitted liability. Information will be provided to the HA which supports our view that their temporary works have caused the problem. We remain in close contact with the HA and await a timescale for the completion of the repair.

Until this is completed we will continue to pump surface water off the affected holes, but they will remain vulnerable to intermittent flooding during periods of heavy rain, as the water table is now at ground level.

In addition, we are developing proposals to introduce a series of permanent drainage ditches and ponds on the 17th and 18th holes. These will increase the rate at which water flows off the

fairways and into additional storage capacity during periods when the Mersey level is high preventing any discharge off the course.

Reinstatement undertaken in July which has now been subject to further prolonged flooding is now at risk of permanent damage. Further reinstatement i.e. verti-draining, seeding and top dressing may be required in early Spring 2020 to fully restore the playing surfaces to their former condition.

Consequently, STRI's next annual inspection will be arranged for late March / early April 2020 to allow any further remedial works to be agreed together with the green's early start conditioning programme.

Works completed this month

The additional workload on the Ground staff following the latest flood, together with very wet ground conditions have had a significant adverse impact on normal course maintenance activities.

However, once the drainage problems have been fully resolved, the intention is to catch up over the Winter and early Spring with the treatment programmes for the greens, tees fairways to ensure the course is fully recovered and in optimum condition at the start of next season.

Greens:

Cutting frequency has been reduced from the normal Summer frequency to once per week, by hand, as growth rate reduces.

No ironing has taken place post flood.

Hole changes are now being changed once / week, normally on a Thursday morning before the Ladies competition.

Verti-draining to increased aeration and improve drainage. Top dressing was not possible due to the prolonged periods of heavy rain.

Some greens are suffering from isolated patches of fusarium. Treatment is not currently considered necessary as the disease will not survive the intermittent light frosts currently being experienced.

Tees:

Cutting has been reduced from the normal Summer frequency to generally once per week.

However, as the growth rate has reduced, some tees have required cutting less frequently.

No treatment this month: None. The annual tee conditioning programme scheduled for late September / early October has had to be put back. However, it is intended that all treatment will have been undertaken by early April 2020. This may require tees to be taken out of play in mid-March to allow tining, seeding and top dressing to take place.

The tees remain in good condition, however like the rest of the course they are very wet. The new artificial teeing areas have been brought into play on the par 3s and the second hole, and three more will be constructed as soon as possible as part of this year's winter programme.

White teeing areas have been withdrawn from use over the Winter period and other teeing areas will be rotated frequently to avoid damage.

Fairways:

Growth rates have reduced in the last month, cutting is now taking place as required and when ground conditions permit.

No treatment this month. It was not possible to undertake the annual verti-draining of the fairways in early October due to the flooding and extremely wet ground conditions elsewhere. There is still a possibility this can be carried out later in the Autumn if we experience a prolonged dry spell. Otherwise it will be undertaken in early Spring. The fairways remain very wet, but with good grass coverage. The incidents of large divots will reduce as mats have been introduced into play.

Rough:

Growth rates have reduced in the last month, cutting is now taking place as required and when ground conditions permit.

No treatment this month:

Bunkers:

Raking frequency intermittent due to periodic flooding.

All bunkers were topped up with fresh sand and rotovated to break up compaction following the July floods.

Following the October floods and periods of heavy rain, most bunkers have been partially or fully flooded at some time during October and compaction issues have returned. A period of dry weather is needed to allow the bunkers to be free of surface water before they can be rotovated and raked again.

Drainage improvements:

Those bunkers worst affected by the recent flooding events will be considered for drainage improvements and inclusion in the 2019 /20 Winter Projects programme.

Practice Areas:

The area was cut once a week in early October, cutting is now taking place as required and when ground conditions permit.

No treatment this month.

Other Areas / Clubhouse grounds

Strimming of re-growth of nettles/weeds around the base of trees, hedges and along buggy paths will continue over the Winter and out of bounds marker posts either side of the hedge between the 5th and 16th holes repainted.

Work by the specialist Contractor to cut the grass slopes to the river bank and hedgerows has been disrupted by the very wet ground conditions.

The HS2 ecological survey continues with 90 reptile mats placed on the course, on holes 1, 2 and 7. The mats have been located in non- mown areas so as not to interfere with play or maintenance of the course.

The Gardening Sub-committee are continuing to meet on a bi-monthly basis, attendance: Bidy Schilizzi (chair), Julie Webb, and Paul Higgins.

The volunteer gardeners continue to maintain planted areas around the Clubhouse.

An updated list of plants that have died as a consequence of the repeat flooding incidents has been produced and submitted to Patrick for inclusion in the compensation claim against the EA.

A gardening working party has removed those plants around the 16th pond that have survived and temporarily replanted these in a safe area. The intention is to form a new planted area around the pond which is higher and further away from the water's edge and at less risk of being submerged.

The wooden planters along the Clubhouse balcony are now also rotten and will be replaced by a number of stand-alone pots. Most of the existing plants will be re-used elsewhere, e.g. in the rockery adjacent to the practice net.

The Ground committee extends its thanks to this hard-working group of volunteers. However, the need for more gardening volunteers remains, as highlighted in the recent Club newsletter.

The toilet unit, adjacent to the 8th tee, was taken off hire at the end of September.

The new "Blue Course" holes have remained in play throughout the Summer. 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:

STRI, through their representative Gwynn Davies, continues to provide valuable technical guidance on how best to address damage caused by the recent flooding events. The Ground committee extends its thanks to Gwynn.

The next annual inspection will take place in late March 2020. This will include reviews of next year's early start treatment programme for the greens, any further treatment needed to the tees to compensate for the deferral of this year's Autumn maintenance programme and whether any further treatment is needed to fairways affected by flooding.

Schedule of Major Competitions in November:

2nd Winter Stableford: Saturday 2nd November.

1st Winter League: Saturday 9th November (postponed).

Daily Mail Qualifier (4 Ball): Saturday 16th November.

Ladies Stableford: Sunday 17th November.

Three Man Team Event: Saturday 23rd November.

3rd Winter Stableford: Saturday 30th November.

Mixed Winter League: Sunday 1st December.

Ongoing liaison between Gary and David Hunter continues regarding course requirements for each week's 7-day competitions.

Machinery update:

No major machinery repairs have been necessary in October.

Capital issues:

A list of small equipment damaged by the floods, and in need of replacement has been compiled and submitted to Patrick. To date the two ride on cylinder mowers, an air compressor and a bunker edger have been replaced

Gary to advise Patrick of other equipment that needs to be replaced as soon as possible.

Gary to review the specification of 6 walkie talkie handsets that are currently on offer and

advise Patrick to order if suitable.

Tree work update

No major damage to trees occurred in October. Proactive tree management by the ground staff will recommence in the Autumn, once ground conditions are suitable and pumping work load has reduced.

The National Grid have now confirmed that the felling of trees to safeguard the integrity of their overhead lines running across the course from the 18th tee to the 13th tee has now been postponed until 2020. 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 next year. However subject to acceptable ground conditions their Contractor will proceed this Autumn with the trimming of a number of trees affecting the playability of the 6th, 13th, 14th and 18th holes.

A £3.1 allowance for STRI to produce a specialist report on tree management has been included in the approved 2019/20 Ground budget submission.

Health & Safety update:

There were no reportable H&S incidents in October, or ground staff “near misses”.

We have yet to receive the report summarising the conclusions of the biannual external H&S audit, conducted by Alan B. Partnership, in early July, which involved a joint course inspection. We also await the finalised COSHH register. Receipt of the register will allow us to complete associated internal documentation, recording authorisation of chemical usage and that all appropriate safety guidance has been read by Ground staff before use. The completed pro-forma will be displayed on Ground’s H&S board consistent with a previous audit report’s recommendations.

Ground’s H&S File will be updated to align with to audit recommendations.

We have requested the next external audit be deferred from December 2019 to January 2020 due to the ongoing disruption to ground staff work load caused by the flooding incidents.

H&S signage provided following s recent “look and see” course inspection has subsequently been damaged by vandals. Replacement with anti-vandal signage is now being investigated.

Gary and Tom will be sent on refresher a chainsaw training course as soon as one becomes available.

2019/20 Winter Project update:

The programme of Winter Projects for 2019/2020 is still being reviewed in light of the recent flooding to establish the extent additional drainage improvements to be included. The current summary of Winter Projects for 2019/2020 (Appendix 2: 2019/20 Winter Projects Version 9 – November 2019) is appended to this Report.

2018/19 Grounds Budget Update:

The wages allowance has been revised to accommodate the appointment of an additional apprentice commencing 1st October 2019. An updated budget has been produced to reflect the change in wages allowance, which has been approved by the Finance Director.

Ground costs incurred for the period up to September 2019 have been assessed and compared with the approved 2019/20 budget assumptions. Excluding costs accrued against the flood claim we are currently forecasting a saving of approximately £2.1k

All additional ground costs arising from the flooding events are being recorded and passed to Patrick. In addition, a photographic record is being kept to support our compensation claim with the EA.

Course Drainage

See “Impact of Flooding Events” and Winter Project update” for proposed drainage enhancements.

Ground Committee Meeting update:

The last Ground meeting was held on Tuesday 5^h November 2019, 1130hrs, attendance: Eric Botham, Chris Killen, Gary Higgins, Tom Cullen and Colin Webb.

The next Ground meeting will be held on Tuesday 3rd December 1130hr.

There were a number of “look and see” meetings held in October, principally to assess the cause of the recent drainage problems and identify temporary remediation measures. In addition, a review of the H&S Annual Planner was carried out to agree actions prior to the next external audit in January 2020.

The next “look and see” meeting will be held on Tuesday 19th November 1130hr to finalise the proposed permanent drainage improvements to the 17th and 18th holes.

Appendix 1: Supporting notes on treatments being applied to greens and their benefits

Sarel rolling: Produces small diameter shallow holes, which breaks up any crust that tends to form on the surface and allows the air, nutrient and especially water to start its journey down to the roots.

Slim solid tining: Produces small diameter but deeper holes and allows the air, nutrient and especially water to get further down into the root system. It also prunes the root system and encourages growth.

Over seeding programme: The aim is to incorporate more bent grasses into the greens as replacement to annual meadow grasses. This will improve the uniformity of the sward and reduce the differential growth rates particularly in the spring, which causes uneven playing surfaces.

Top dressing: Regular applications of top dressing will reduce surface imperfections and produce a firmer and faster playing surface. In conjunction with tining it will also improve drainage through reduction in thatch.

Verticutting: Vertical blades lift the horizontal grass sward allowing the following mower to cut the grass more evenly. In addition, the blades remove excessive leaf growth that contributes to puffy, spongy surface conditions and open grooves in the turf canopy for the incorporation of sand topdressing.

Ironing / rolling: The process smoothes the playing surface and the associated vibrating action allows the top dressing to pass through the tines deeper into root system.

Wetting agent: Allows even water penetration through the playing surface and into the root system, reducing surface water ponding and dry patching.

Vertidrainage to greens and fairways: The tines are larger in diameter and deeper, up to 12 inches, and a heave or levering action is applied similar to that of a fork. Below the surface the compacted layers are broken up leaving pockets into which essential elements can percolate. The technique has also been applied to the 5th and 6th fairways with sand being introduced to improve drainage and surface condition.