

Ground Report March 2020

Winter rules covering fairways, rough and bunkers, and mandatory use of mats remain in place until ground conditions improve.

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

The outlet drain is now operating normally allowing water to drain off the course into the 16th pond and into the River Mersey as soon as river levels fall. However, exceptional levels of rainfall over February (over 333% more than the long-term average for the month) associated with Storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge resulted in large areas of the 13th, 17th and 18th being covered again in standing water. River levels were also very high for most of the month preventing drainage into the Mersey.

Our own pumps are being used to remove water from the 18th fairway, and we have re-hired a larger pump to pump water off the course from the 16th pond into the river. We requested pumping support from the EA, but understandably their pumps were all deployed to address more serious flooding incidents.

Our concerns that the drains running down the 17th and 18th fairways were not working properly were confirmed when trial holes were taken to expose the end of each drain on 12th and 13th February. This identified that the joint between each lateral drain and the main collector drain had slipped preventing flow off the course into the 16th pond. This problem was temporarily resolved by removing the faulty joint and will be fully resolved by extending each drain into the new ditch / drain running across both fairways.

The package of work to dig the ditch and undertake jetting to remove silt deposits has had to be postponed several times due to the flooding of these holes. It is hoped the excavation work can now take place during the first week in March, with the jetting taking place early the following week. Installation of the extended drain runs on the 17th and 18th fairways will be undertaken by the ground staff on completion of the jetting.

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. Current indications are that the valve is not functioning correctly.

Assurance that the flap valve is working will allow us to maintain our isolating valve in an open position allowing discharge off the course at all times when river levels are low. Currently the valve is being closed when heavy rain is forecast.

We have held a meeting with the EA, at which they provided outline details of their proposals to replace the defective outlet sluice gate which caused the flooding

incidents in July and October 2019. They have committed to involve us fully in the design proposals and indicated that they aim to have the work completed by the end of this year. They also provided assurances that they would undertake regular maintenance of the flap valve on the outlet to the 1st stream which should reduce flooding events.

A high-level proposal for providing flood protection to the basement storage areas of the clubhouse was also discussed at the meeting with the EA. They provide indicative estimates of a similar scheme in the Didsbury basin, which were far in excess of what the Club could afford so we will not be pursuing this proposal.

The cut-off drain at the base of the M60 embankment remains blocked in places, resulting in localised flooding of the course from the 13th tee to the 16th tee. The Highways Agency have been notified of the problem, and a meeting has been requested to deal with this and a number of other ongoing issues.

The ground staff continue to remove localised silt deposits from the drainage system, which have built following the flooding events, allowing standing water to drain away more rapidly. In addition, short lengths of additional drain runs have been installed by the ground staff as part of this year's Winter Projects (see Appendix 2 and Section 1g)

Reinstatement undertaken following the July floods, continues to be subject to further prolonged flooding and areas may be at risk of permanent damage. Further reinstatement i.e. verti-draining, seeding and top dressing will be required in late March to fully restore the playing surfaces to their former condition. Fine Turf undertook an inspection of the affected holes in mid-February and are available to commence work as soon as ground conditions permit.

Works completed this month

The impact of heavy rains associated with Storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge has caused further disruption to normal course maintenance activities. Saturated ground has severely restricted use of heavier machinery needed to treat greens and tees and cut fairways and rough.

A five-week emergency ground plan has been developed to catch up with the treatment programmes for the greens, tees and fairways to ensure the course is fully recovered and in optimum condition at the start of next season. Full implementation however remains conditional on a significant improvement in the weather.

Greens:

Cutting generally, once per fortnight by hand, due to negligible growth rate over much of February. However, due recent increase in growth rate, frequency of cutting will return to once per week.

No ironing has taken place this month.

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

No treatment this month: None. The fusarium disease has now died back and will not require treatment by a fungicide. The disease has left some surface scarring which will be addressed by the early Spring treatment programme.

We still intend to complete the early Spring conditioning programme by the end of March. This will comprise of the following applications: Green Lawngr (which increases absorption of solar radiation and reduces differential growth), lawn sand, and then a cold start granular fertiliser to boost early growth. The treatment will be supplemented by regular tining and top dressing with sand.

All the greens damaged by vandalism have been returned into play apart from the 7th green which suffered the deepest gouges. The Spring conditioning programme will aid the recovery of this green and it should be available to return into play by the end of March.

Tees:

The tees have not required cutting, due to negligible growth over much of February. However, due recent increase in growth rate, cutting at once per week will re-commence in early March

No treatment this month.

We still intend to complete the early Spring conditioning programme by the end of March. This will comprise of the following applications: Wetting agent, fertiliser, full depth verti-draining followed by seeding and top dressing with sand. This will require tees to be temporarily taken out of play.

The tees remain in good condition, however like the rest of the course they are very wet. The new artificial teeing areas remain in play on the par 3s and the second and 11th holes. White teeing areas have been withdrawn from use over the Winter period and other teeing areas will be rotated frequently to avoid damage.

Construction of new artificial tees on the 5th, 11th and 12th holes have been completed as part of this year's Winter Projects. The surface of the 12th tee has suffered some settlement and will be re-sanded and levelled.

Fairways:

The fairways have not required cutting, due to negligible growth over much of February. However, due recent increase in growth rate, frequency of cutting will return to once per week as soon as ground conditions permit.

No treatment this month.

It was not possible to undertake the annual verti-draining of the fairways last year due to the flooding and extremely wet ground conditions. Fine Turf inspected the course on 10th February and indicated that if ground conditions improve, they will be able to verti-drain fairways (2 days' work) and over-seed damaged areas (1 days' work) in mid to late March.

The fairways remain very wet, but with good grass coverage. However, the incidents of large divots increased significantly when the use of mats became discretionary.

The temporary change to revised Winter Rules (compulsory use of mats) has reduced this problem. Fairways are also now clear of leaves.

Rough:

The rough has not required cutting, due to negligible growth rate over much of February. However, due recent increase in growth rate, frequency of cutting will return to once per week as soon as ground conditions permit.

No treatment this month.

All areas of the rough are clear of leaves.

Bunkers:

It has not possible to rake this month due the regular flooding, following periods of heavy rain.

Greenside bunkers will have to be rotovated again to break up compacted areas and edges re-trimmed. As soon as the course becomes dry enough this work will recommence to allow bunkers to be returned into play before the end of March.

Bunkers remain out of play.

A small number of bunkers have been linked to new or recently jetted drains, which should reduce the incidence of standing water.

Practice Areas:

The practice greens have been cut by hand, the fairway has not required cutting, due to slow growth rate over much of February. However, due recent increase in growth rate, frequency of cutting will return to once per week as soon as 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 re-commence in March, 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 riverbank and hedgerows remains stopped. If ground conditions permit, work on the hedgerows is likely recommence in late March before the start of the nesting season.

The HS2 ecological survey reptile mats have been removed from 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 carry out limited Winter activities, such as leaf removal from beds, trimming, adjustments to bedding areas and placing of wood chip to reduce weed growth. The damaged area around the practice putting green has been cleared of stone, top soiled and seeded.

Some damage to beds has been caused by heavy plant / lorries gaining access to the HA working area. This issue has been raised with the HA together the damage caused to the car park area, particularly around the disabled parking area.

Thanks to a kind donation from a member additional pots will be purchased and placed along the balcony area once this is returned into use.

In the Spring it is intended to re-plant the area around the 16th pond and to the side of the 17th green, which has suffered significant damage from the floods and associated temporary pumping activities.

The Ground committee extends its thanks to this hard-working group of volunteers. However, the need for more gardening volunteers remains

Damage to the track behind the 16th and 9th tees caused by the Contractor employed

by the National Grid to removed tall trees from the M60 embankment adjacent to their HV lines will be reinstated in early Spring. The Club has received compensation from the National Grid for this work.

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

The new “Blue Course” holes have remained in play throughout the Winter. 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.

This year’s annual inspection will be split into 2 visits. The first will take place on Tuesday 24th March, 1100hrs. This will focus on the early Spring conditioning programmes for the greens and tees and how the reinstatement of damaged areas of fairways is progressing (to be undertaken by Fine Turf in late February / early March).

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

Schedule of Major Competitions in March:

4th Mixed Winter League: Sunday 1st March (cancelled).

6th Winter Stableford: Saturday 7th March.

4th Winter League: Saturday 14th March.

4th Mixed Winter League: Sunday 15th March (rearranged).

Winter Stableford Final: Saturday 21st March.

Texas Scramble: Saturday 28th March.

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

Machinery update:

No major machinery repairs were required in February. Six replacement machinery seats are due for delivery. Existing seats were no longer fit for purpose and were posing a health and safety risk.

Replacements for small equipment damaged by the floods is virtually complete apart from a replacement woodchipper.

Tree work update

One tree on the 18th was damaged by Storm Jorge.

Limited proactive tree management by the ground staff will recommence in March, principally to the 15th hole, once ground conditions are suitable.

We are still awaiting confirmation from the National Grid when they intend to fell trees across the course from the 16th tee to the 13th tee to safeguard the integrity of

their overhead lines. 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 impact of the loss of trees along this corridor has now been developed, with the intention that this forms part of the incentive package presented to members. It is also intended to persuade the HA to carry out low level planting along the M60 embankment to complement our proposals.

A £3.1 allowance for STRI to produce a specialist report on tree management is still retained in the approved 2019/20 Ground budget.

Health & Safety update:

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

The latest external H&S audit was conducted by Alan B. Partnership on Tuesday 21st January 2020. No major problems were identified. We await the report summarising the conclusions of the audit.

A draft Ground H&S Planner has been produced for 2020, this will be finalised on receipt of the Alan B. Partnership audit report.

An order for the list of replacement or new H&S signs will be issued in early March. These will be installed in a manner which reduces the risk of future vandalism.

Consideration will be given to Gary and Tom obtaining licences to operate large excavation machinery. This would increase the in-house capability to undertake larger Winter Projects, particularly related to drainage improvements

2019/20 Winter Project update:

The current summary of Winter Projects for 2019/2020 (Appendix 2: 2019/20 Winter Projects Version 13 – March 2020) is appended to this Report.

2018/19 Grounds Budget Update:

Ground costs incurred for the period up to January 2020 have been assessed and compared with the approved 2019/20 budget. Excluding costs accrued against the flood claim we are currently forecasting a saving of approximately £2.9k, reflecting reduced green keeping activities caused by the flooding between August and January.

We are prepared to defer the commissioning of the STRI tree report until the next financial year, saving a further £3.1k, which will offset in part drainage improvements to the 17th and 18th holes.

However, the saving doesn't take into any costs associated with emergency pumping which had to be mobilised in early March.

Course Drainage

Subject to weather and ground conditions Phase 1 drainage improvements affecting

the 17th and 18th fairways will take place week commencing the first week in March. This will comprise of extending existing drains along both fairways into a new ditch across the front of the Ladies 18th tee. The existing drains will then be inspected and jetted to clear any silt / blockages. The section of ditch across the 17th fairway will be filled in with a solid pipe taking surface water towards a new pond linked to the existing 16th pond. The arrangement will allow both fairways to be jetted in the future with minimal disruption. Phil Hill continues to provide valuable technical support in the delivery of these proposals.

Ground Committee Meeting update:

The last Ground meeting was held on Tuesday 3rd March 2020, 1130hrs, attendance: Eric Botham, Chris Killen, Gary Higgins, Tom Cullen and Colin Webb.

The next Ground meeting will be held on Tuesday 7th April 2020, 1130hr.

The last “look and see” inspection to develop the emergency 5-week ground plan, took place on Tuesday 25th February.

The next “look and see” meeting will be the STRI course inspection on Tuesday 24th March to review course conditioning programmes. A follow up meeting will be held on Tuesday 31st March to review any recommendations provided by STRI.

Ground Works programmed for March if different from February (weather dependent).

Increased focus on conditioning of tees, green and bunkers.