

## **Ground Report February 2020**

### *Introductory Notes:*

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

### *Impact of Flooding Events*

The outlet drain is now operating normally allowing water to drain off the course into the 16<sup>th</sup> pond and into the River Mersey as soon as river levels fall, i.e. generally 24-36 hours after heavy rain.

The Pond level was monitored closely following Storm Ciara on 8<sup>th</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> February and it fell rapidly to normal / low level within 48 hours.

As a consequence, no temporary pumping has been necessary in January /early February.

However, it took over 3 days for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways to be clear of standing water following Storm Ciara, reinforcing our concerns that the drains are not working properly. Trial holes will be taken to expose the end of each drain on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February.

A package of work to investigate the condition of these drains and undertake jetting to remove silt deposits has been developed and quotations obtained. This includes the provision of additional access/jetting points allowing the Club to carry out regular maintenance works, ensuring the drainage system continues to operate efficiently.

It was intended to undertake the work week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> February. This has had to be postponed, following Storm Ciara, until week commencing 17<sup>th</sup> February when hopefully ground conditions will have improved sufficiently to allow transport of jetting equipment on to this area of the course

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 16<sup>th</sup> pond.

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.

A visual inspection of the outlet flap valve protecting the stream on the 1<sup>st</sup> from back feeding, when river levels are high, has been conducted. The valve is suffering from a build-up of river debris and is not seating properly. Photographs of the problem have been taken and sent to the EA with an accompanying letter. They have responded formally accepting responsibility for its maintenance and have given a commitment to undertake regular maintenance. We await confirmation that this has been undertaken. We have also requested a meeting with the EA to seek assurances that work is in hand to prevent further flooding events.

The Club have purchased a replacement portable pump.

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 are being installed by the ground staff as part of this year's Winter Projects.

The cut-off drain at the base of the M60 embankment is now blocked in places. This has resulted in localised flooding of the course from the 13th tee to the 16<sup>th</sup> tee. The Highways Agency have been notified of the problem, and a meeting has been requested to deal with a number of other ongoing issues.

A high-level proposal for providing flood protection to the basement storage areas of the Clubhouse will also be investigated as part of the forthcoming meeting with the EA.

Reinstatement undertaken following the July floods, has now been 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 early Spring 2020 to fully restore the playing surfaces to their former condition.

#### *Works completed this month*

The impact of Storm Ciara has caused further disruption to normal course maintenance activities.

However, the intention over the remainder of the Winter and early Spring is still 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.

#### *Greens:*

Cutting generally, once per week by hand, due to slow growth rate.

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. A fungicide has now been purchased to treat isolated patches of fusarium. However, it has not been possible to apply the treatment due to prolonged windy conditions. Subject to weather and ground conditions the fungicide will be applied week commencing 17<sup>th</sup> February together with Green Lawngr, which forms part of the greens early Spring conditioning programme.

A number of greens were damaged by vandalism, suffering deep gouges caused by a motorbike. The ground staff have carried out repairs, but the worst affected areas will require top dressing and re-seeding. Meanwhile winter greens have brought into play on these holes.

#### *Tees:*

The tees have not required cutting, due to slow growth rate. However, if the mild weather continues and the ground dries out the tees will be cut in late February.

Treatment this month: None. The annual tee conditioning programme cancelled in early October 2019 due to flooding will be undertaken during March. This may require tees to be taken out of play 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 remain in play on the par 3s and the second and 11<sup>th</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> holes have been completed as part of this year's Winter Projects. The surface of the 12<sup>th</sup> tee has suffered some settlement and will be re-sanded and levelled. Work on the 5<sup>th</sup> tee has now started.

*Fairways:*

The fairways have not required cutting, due to slow growth rate.

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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 late February or early 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:*

Cutting frequency: The rough has not required cutting, due to slow growth rate.

Treatment this month: None.

Condition / length issues: Most areas of the rough are now clear of leaves.

*Bunkers:*

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

Greenside bunkers are now being rotovated to break up compacted areas and edges are also being trimmed. This work will continue to allow them to be returned into play by the end of February.

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.

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 5<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> holes repainted.

Work by the specialist Contractor to cut the grass slopes to the riverbank and hedgerows remains stopped. Work on the hedgerows will recommence in late February / early 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, and adjustments to bedding areas. 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.

The rotten wooden planters have been removed from the Clubhouse balcony to allow this to be re-sealed. Most of the plants have been relocated in widened beds around the Pro's shop.

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 16<sup>th</sup> pond and to the side of the 17<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 February:*

5<sup>th</sup> Winter Stableford: Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February.

3<sup>rd</sup> Mixed Winter League: Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February.

4<sup>th</sup> Winter League: Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February.

3 Man Team Event: Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February.

4 Ball Better Ball Stableford: Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

5<sup>th</sup> Winter League: Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> February.

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 January. Six replacement seats have been ordered as these were no longer fit for purpose and were posing a health and safety risk.

*Capital issues:*

Replacements for small equipment damaged by the floods is virtually complete. It is proposed to replace the damaged wood chipper with a larger second-hand unit, with an equivalent purchase price.

*Tree work update*

No major damage to trees occurred in January or early February following Storm Ciara.

Proactive tree management by the ground staff will recommence in late February, once ground conditions are suitable. Replacement PPE needed for chainsaw work has been delivered.

Gary Higgins and Tom Cullen attended and passed a refresher Forestry course in early February.

We are still awaiting confirmation from the National Grid when they intend to fell trees across the course from the 16<sup>th</sup> tee to the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes (to prevent damage to the course from vehicle movements).

A plan to soften the impact of the loss of trees along this corridor is now being developed, with the intention that this forms part of the incentive package presented to members.

A £3.1 allowance for STRI to produce a specialist report on tree management is still retained in the approved 2019/20 Ground budget. However, this may have to be deferred to reduce costs should our Insurers not agree to fund our drainage proposals for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways.

*Health & Safety update:*

There were no reportable H&S incidents in January. However, there was one ground staff "near miss" in mid-January.

Ground's H&S Files, annual Planner and sign-off proformas have all been updated to ensure compliance with the previous external H&S audit, conducted by Alan B. Partnership in July 2019.

The latest external H&S audit was conducted by Alan B. Partnership on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. No major problems were identified. We await the report summarising the conclusions of the audit. This will form the basis of Ground's 2020 H&S Planner.

A "look and see" course inspection of H&S signage took place on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020. A list of replacement or new signs has been produced. 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 12 – February 2020) is appended to this Report.

*2018/19 Grounds Budget Update:*

Ground costs incurred for the period up to December 2019 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 £1.9k, reflecting reduced green keeping activities caused by the flooding between August and December.

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*

Subject to weather and ground conditions Phase 1 drainage improvements affecting the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways will take place week commencing 18<sup>th</sup> February. This will comprise of extending existing drains along both fairways into a new ditch across the front of the Ladies 18<sup>th</sup> tee. The existing drains will then be inspected and jetted to clear any silt / blockages. The section of ditch across the 17<sup>th</sup> fairway will be filled in with a solid pipe taking surface water towards the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 development of these proposals.

The next Ground meeting will be held on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020, 1130hr. The last "look and see" course inspection (H&S) took place on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January. The next "look and see" meeting will be held on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February to review progress on drainage improvements to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> fairways and agree proposals for replacement H&S course signage.