

## Golf Committee Chairman's Update – 29 November 2023

### Course Report

I encourage all of you to read Peter Bradburn's frequent course reports posted on the information board in the Club's Reception, but to summarise we received the equivalent of an extra month's rain through October and into early November. Despite these record rain falls, the ambient temperature has remained unseasonably mild, which has resulted in predicted growth patterns we usually see in May, and not November, when we would ordinarily expect to see turf growth approaching dormancy, not active growth.

These unprecedented amounts of rain have had a dual effect on the course with the high and rising water table closer to the ground level than normal for this time of the year. The high level of rain is falling faster than the ground can absorb, and collectively, these issues are leading to the soil profile reaching saturation point more often and for more prolonged periods. And given our course has various locations with different elevations, the drainage potential varies significantly, so the course will not drain uniformly but will be governed by topology and soil characteristics.

Although we are still in a situation where growth of the turf grass has not been paused by persistent colder weather, the rain has somewhat subsided, so the team has taken advantage of drier conditions to cut surfaces and tidy areas up, as much as surface conditions allow without damaging them.

### Green Conditions and Temporary Greens

As winter progresses, Peter is finding that several greens (particularly the ones near the perimeter of the southern border of the course) are struggling with low light levels across the course. Greens such as the 4th, 14th and 16th receive less or no direct sunlight because the arc of the sun doesn't rise high enough above the tree line in the winter. This results in colder but wetter greens with a weakened grass plant and a reduced root mass, which in turn leads to poor metabolic function of the grass. As it did two years ago, the team is now looking to request permission from Roehampton University and Ibstock School to thin trees in these areas which would help the situation, but it should be noted that, like the temporary greens we have already seen on other holes, it is highly likely that these three greens will also require some respite from play at some point.

We have asked for Peter and his team to ensure that all temporary greens are as defined and as playable as possible although I was reminded that the wet conditions of the locations in which they are found naturally limit the length to which the areas can be cut as well as the amount of hole locations that can be chosen.

To mitigate some of these limitations, going forward we have requested for the larger bucket holes (which by all accounts have been well received) to be placed on all temporary greens on days when there is no 'competition golf'. These are defined as any day on which a competition is held, including both internal qualifying competitions and interclub events, but not including winter knock out matches or fun competitions.

### Paths, Bunkers and Other Winter Works

The progress and timing of winter works around the course is also governed by the ground conditions so as not to damage the course further.

Path refurbishment is currently in progress with the pathway across the 12th hole being relevelled. Thereafter, the haul route between holes 14 and 3 will be similarly refurbished to improve the surface conditions. Progress on this will continue into the New Year dependent on the weather conditions. Intended upgrades to the paths around the 7th hole hut will be postponed however, as this additional cost has not been budgeted for.

You will also have undoubtedly noticed the works around the 6th tee. We are planning on installing hurdle fences, similar to the ones between the 3rd fairway and 15th tee, to protect players from stray shots off the 16th tee. These hurdle fences will be accompanied by new planting materials which, once sufficiently mature, are expected to replace the fences themselves over time.

You may also notice that some bunkers will seem to have sand with a slightly different appearance from other bunkers. This is because we are now actively replacing contaminated bunker sand with a new sand, sourced from a different supplier, which appears slightly different in colour. The team will continue to monitor other contaminated bunkers and will actively continue this sand replacement process in the spring when the conditions are more suitable.

Finally, I should note that we are planning to aerate greens during the second week of December (as per normal) to attempt to keep a level of air flow around the plant roots. We will also be replacing tree losses from last year with a more tolerant tree species.

### Indoor Golf Centre Update

Marc Newey and I recently met with Wandsworth Council planners to update them on our design adjustments on the Indoor Golf Centre and I am happy to report that, despite the recent news around Wandsworth Council and the new stadium plans at the All-England Club, the planners seem quite enthusiastic about our latest proposals. They have accepted the two-storey design but have requested we make some slight tweaks, including horizontal (rather than vertical) cladding as well as timber clad fascias and columns. This is all highly encouraging, and with a bit of luck, we may even avoid having to take this project to elected council members for final sign off. We expect to submit our final planning proposal in the early part of 2024, followed by an anticipated timeline where we receive full approval in the spring and complete the construction tender process by the early summer. Given that actual construction would take an estimated nine months, it would be reasonable to expect the project to complete around the spring/summer of 2025, barring unforeseen delays.

Below you will find some of the latest designs that have been submitted to the council.



## Additional Matters

The Golf Committee met this past Tuesday to discuss a host of other pressing items, which are summarised below for your information:

- *3-star course preparation*
  - I can confirm that the Board has approved for the necessary budget to ensure the course is presented at a 3-star level (such as for the Spring and Autumn Meetings) for as much of the summer period as is possible, starting in 2024. This includes resources for additional equipment and staffing hours.
- *Wet areas around the course*
  - There are several areas around the course that are extremely wet. This has been acknowledged by Peter Bradburn and his team, and over time, we will look to replicate the success we have had with the trench drainage works on 13 and 14 in other parts of the course, such as the approach on 16.
- *Divot sandbags*
  - In the spring we are going to ask the starters to provide portable bags, filled with seeded sand, to encourage all players to help take care of our course by filling divots on fairways and on tees that do not already have sand boxes.
- *Weekend cover*
  - Going forward, there will be adequate representation amongst the greenkeepers, administration and starters to ensure that appropriate decisions are made in respect of closing, but more importantly re-opening, of the course at weekends when on duty staff work shorter hours.
- *Two-tee start*
  - There was a request to consider a two tee start on a single weekday during the summer to split four-balls from two-balls, but this request was rejected by the Committee.
- *Knock-out booking privileges*
  - As we all know it can be very cumbersome to find the right time to arrange a fourball or foursomes knock out match when needing to align the calendars of four playing partners. Add to this the uncertainty of being able to secure the agreed upon slot through Intelligent Golf, there is an argument to be made to facilitate this through enhanced booking privileges. Although the Committee did not agree to grant explicit pre-booking privileges, we are exploring the possibility of a system where, for four-person knock out events *only*, we allocate blocks of tee time slots on certain predetermined days, exclusively for first (and possibly second round) knock out matches. Participants will not be mandated to utilise these slots, but they could be available to them to ensure the matches can more easily be arranged and played on those specific days.
- *New pins*
  - As previously mentioned, we are sourcing new pins with thin bottoms, but are still exploring whether these are available with GPS reflectors at the top.
- *IG booking system*
  - It has come to our attention that there are still too many members that are finding ways to manipulate the booking system to their advantage.
  - These include:

- Pre-booking slots with the names of unwitting members, only later to replace them with actual sourced playing partners
  - Late cancellation of bookings, particularly when playing partners cannot be sourced (as above), and
  - No shows
- Can I please remind you that these abuses are not in the spirit of golf membership at Roehampton and are generally frowned upon as they take playing opportunities away from other members
- These matters are closely monitored and repeat offenders will be notified and booking restrictions can and have been applied
- *Balls leaving the boundary of the Club*
  - Stray golf shots continue to leave the boundary of the course, so can I please remind you that it is incumbent on all golfers to ensure that any balls leaving the boundary of the Club premises are immediately reported to the Sports Shop or Reception following completion of play
  - The Club will not be nearly as supportive, financially or otherwise, of any damage caused by errant shots if it has not been properly informed beforehand
  - In respect of the 12<sup>th</sup> hole in particular, we are considering removing the out of bounds on the left as well as substantially widening the left side of the fairway to encourage players to aim away from Priory Lane.

### **Final thoughts**

No real final thoughts today, as this submission has been long enough, other than to congratulate all the members of the different knock out teams (e.g. Derry and Pearson) on their recent successes. Keep it going!

As always, I encourage you to keep up to date by reading these Recorder contributions as well as the minutes of the Golf Committee which are available on the Club website under 'The Club – Committees and Minutes' and of course feel free to email me with any thoughts or concerns you may have.

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