Grass Clippings

Greens' renovation

The summer has eventually kicked in, with warm August days for everyone to enjoy making the most of our fabulous Club facilities. July started on rather a different tack, with downpours that exceeded the month's rainfall very quickly. These were not the most pleasant conditions for undertaking the greens' renovations this summer, especially as the plan had been to progress with the usual organic matter removal to the majority of the greens and begin the greens' renovations programme. This year we are starting with the worst-draining greens that hold water through the winter and cause significant loss of play time. Although we were slowed down by the storms, which delivered 40mm of rain the weekend before we started, the team persisted with the task to trench and backfill the line across the greens.

The drainage system that we have used, the System 25 technique, traditionally sees the drains set low in the profile of the green to capture the excess water once it has filtered through a gravel layer. As we suspected and found through the deep excavation of the trenching for the new drainage, the material that the greens were built with, back during the 1950's modification of the course, is now consolidated to the extent that it impeded the movement of water through the greens' profile. By installing a matrix of micro sized drains closer to the rootzone area, we are essentially by-passing the ineffective drainage system beneath. Although the installation process was arduous and involved the whole team's involvement, to lift turf, install the drains, consolidate the drainage materials, and then replace the turf, the end product merited the exercise.

The healthy root zone sits on top of the consolidated silt clay material that the greens were built from in the 1950's:

The results are that the turf is now re-establishing nicely, and we have good rooting in the lifted areas. The team are working constantly to reinstate the levels across the greens, which relies upon rolling and small, frequent top-dressing events to add sand into the surface. We will need to keep this regime well into the winter, whenever the weather will allow for dressing to be applied.

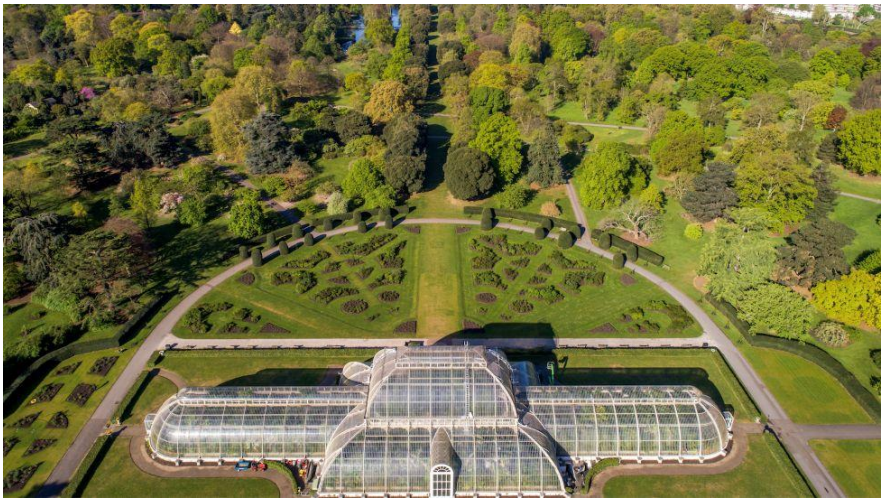
So far, the results are encouraging, we have had several heavy rain showers while the greens had just been completed and the surface water drained well.

The real test will come in the winter, when all the hydraulic forces come into play – water falling downwards from the sky, upwards and sideways as the water table increases, plus water moving across the slope of the land. We are on a hillside after all. We hope that the drainage works will be a game changer for the golf course in the winter period and ensure that the surfaces can cope with the increasingly wetter winters becoming the norm for the UK.

A hive of activity – replacing the turf on the drained greens:

Planting for the future

As we are all aware, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, is just a short stroll from the Club upriver. In a study published by Kew this month, it has revealed over half of the 11,000 trees currently found at the 320-acre Gardens in London may be at risk by 2090. Computer modelling techniques that combine moisture and annual temperature more conservatively predict that one third of Kew's trees may be vulnerable by the end of this century. The impetus for this study came out of the result of the 2022 drought period which saw losses of more than 400 trees at Kew Gardens, compared to an average loss of 30 trees most years. *Planting for the Future: Kew's Landscape Succession Plan* uses novel climate models that have been empirically tested by Kew horticulturists and scientists to determine the species we need to start planting nationally now.



The splendours of Kew Gardens tree collection:

As we have observed within the Club's estate, species such as silver birch, (*Betula pendula*) mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*), common oak (*Quercus robur*), common beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium),* have all suffered over the last few years and the Royal Botanical Gardens believes that they could be at risk in areas of the UK with a similar climate to Kew in southwest London. All of Kew's 'Old Lions' (five of the oldest trees in the gardens) are expected to thrive even in the worst-case climate scenario. These trees, none of which are British natives, were planted in the mid-1700s. Tony Kirkham, the retired tree manager who managed Kew's collection for more than 30 years, is helping the Club to look at species of trees which should withstand the issues that a changing climate will bring and recommending planting species with built-in resilience for the future.

A surfeit of slugs

One of the peculiarities of this year's wet and warm conditions is the ideal scenario for a boom in the snail and slug population. Currently there is a 175% increase in production of slug control items entering the domestic garden nursery market. The word *slug* is also often used as part of the common name of any gastropod mollusc that has no shell, or a very reduced shell. Slugs' bodies are made up mostly of water and, without a full-sized shell, their soft tissues are prone to desiccation. They must generate protective mucus to survive. Many species are most active just after a rain because of the moist ground or during nighttime. It is estimated that slug damage creates £80million worth of damage in the agriculture sector. In recent years, iron phosphate baits have emerged which have taken over from metaldehyde products which have now been withdrawn because of the exposure risk to domestic or wild animals. Other slug control methods are generally useful in small gardens, which includes beer traps, diatomaceous earth, and copper tape, which is a barrier method. Crushed materials and items such as wool, again are used to create a barrier which the slug would find difficult to cross. Generally, in a real-life scenario, a hungry slug will always find a way to help themselves to your prized begonias or chomp through a tasty lettuce or three. The last word goes to TV gardener Alan Titchmarsh who in the *Gardeners' World* magazine this month stated: 'It's all very well espousing "slugs are our friends". Follow through and it will only be a matter of

time before we have to put up with bed bugs, fleas and head lice.' He said it was 'unrealistic' to expect gardeners to welcome 'every pest and disease because it has a right to exist. Maybe it does, but not in my patch. My slugs are re-homed into hedgerow next door.'

A leopard slug inspecting the 10th bunkers:

Indian Bean Trees (*Catalpa bignonioides*)

Last word comes in the form of a picture. The two Indian Bean Trees (*Catalpa bignonioides*), to the right of the 17th greens were flowering fantastically for several weeks this summer. After years of lack lustre blossoming, this season's weather conditions seem to have suited them well enough to put on a great display. The tree itself was introduced into Europe from the southeast US in 1726.

The tree produces very large, bright green fleshy leaves late in the spring and an exotic, orchid-like, trumpet-shaped pink-white flower in midsummer. It is one of the very last trees to come into leaf in the spring. As the common name suggests, the Indian Bean Tree produces large, dark 'beans' in the autumn, similar in look to vanilla pods. These beans remain on the tree for most of the winter months, giving it a slightly angry appearance.

Catalpa bignonioides will thrive on most soil conditions, however it is best avoided in windy or hard paved areas, as the fleshy leaves can become damaged if subjected to excessive wind or heat. The Indian Bean Trees are part of the history of the Club and were planted on the course by Peter Miller before his death in 1975.

Peter Bradburn
Course and Grounds Director