

# THE GOLF BUSINESS

Issue 26 • May 2019

FEATURING

## Howard Craft

general manager of  
Berkhamsted Golf Club

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THE GOLF COURSE

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FOOD AND BEVERAGE

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# Here's

three major issues I discovered in the last month that are all covered in the following pages:

## Could your club forge a deal with a local ice hockey team?

Forming partnerships with other companies, organisations and golf clubs has kept some venues alive in recent years, and there's a trend towards joining forces with non-golf sports clubs – specifically ice hockey, possibly because a number of ice hockey players are also golfers. For example, Telford Tigers' head coach is a member of Telford Hotel & Golf Resort, and the golf club has now joined the likes of Oxford GC and Renfrew GC by promoting itself to fans, and even players, of their local ice hockey team.

## What would all-year-round British Summer Time (BST) do for your club?

The CEO of the new UK Golf Federation, Doug Poole, has said having BST in winter 'would help stimulate all areas of participation and driving ranges would use less power'.

His comments come as a poll of nearly five million people in Europe found 84 per cent were in favour of discontinuing biannual clock changes.

## Golf and Health Week is the start of something bigger

Golf and Health Week in mid-April was a concerted effort by golf's governing bodies to promote the health benefits of the game – which are almost unique, according to environmental psychologist Professor Jenny Roe.

"To play golf you are helping manage your mental health in a very holistic way," she said. "When you step into a green space your parasympathetic nervous system kicks in and your stress physiology changes. You manage stress more efficiently. Contact with nature allows us to recover from brain fatigue, reduces our stress levels and improves our mood. This is linked to the 'broaden and build' hypothesis – an increased capacity for creative thought and cognitive flexibility that can lead to new thought-action repertoires off the golf course."

**Alistair Dunsmuir, Editor**



To let us know what you think of this month's *The Golf Business*, or to comment on specific issues or advise us of your clubhouse / course renovation plans, please email [golf@unionpress.co.uk](mailto:golf@unionpress.co.uk)

# THE GOLF BUSINESS

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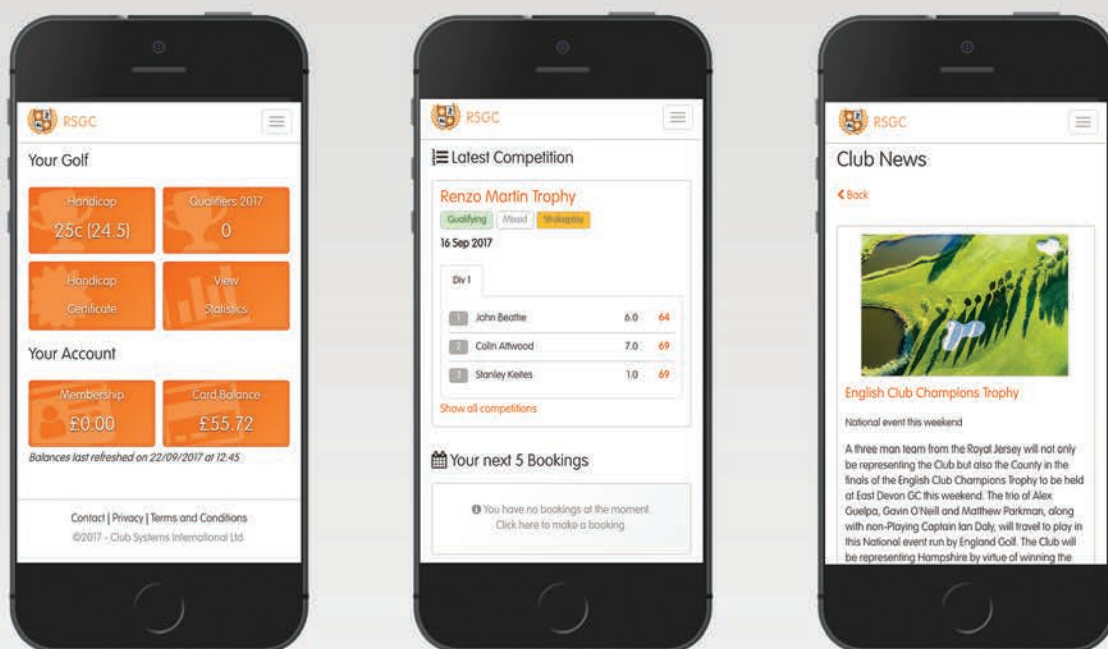
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# Former Mack Golf clubs have their futures secured

**Two golf** clubs that closed down last year when their operator, Mack Golf, went into liquidation, have both had their futures secured.

Hooton Golf Club, also known as Ellesmere Port Golf Club, in Cheshire, is now run by The Ian Woosnam Golf Academy and Golf Courses.

Tony Minshall, managing director of The Ian Woosnam Golf Academy and Golf Courses' parent company, RM Estates, and a former European Tour player himself, said: "Our company policy is to make each of our courses a course for all. Ian actively wants young people to take up the game and try to emulate what he has achieved.

"We offer free membership to junior golfers under the

age of 18 at all our sites. This is Ian's commitment to junior golfers."

The company has invested in a fleet of new mowers and other machines for use at Hooton.

At the same time, Stony Holme Golf Club in Carlisle has also been rescued.

Jim Douglas, who previously managed the facility for 20 years, has vowed to bring the course and the neighbouring Swifts Driving Range back to life.

Former head greenkeeper Robin Little, who will act as an advisor to help get the course back on its feet, said: "This is great news for the club and good news for Carlisle, because it means the city has a site for grass roots golfers again. I wish Jim all the best."

The maintenance commissioned by the local council has meant the course will be back in action far more quickly than would otherwise have been the case, added Mark Thompson, the club's captain when it closed last year.



## 'We'll be back' says Zebra Finance

**Zebra Finance**, which provides financial options to people who buy memberships at more than 200 golf clubs, has said it will be back after it announced that it is no longer accepting credit applications from new or existing golf club customers.

The issue revolves around the company's funder, Raphaels Bank, which has detailed how it will achieve a solvent wind-down involving a commitment to cease all lending. This decision has placed Zebra in the position of being unable to accept any new applications for credit.

According to Peter Fletcher, CEO of Zebra Finance, the company hopes to be in a position to accept credit applications from new or existing customers again soon.

"We are solvent and we are trading," he said.

"We were reliant on one lender but we will be back soon

and this time we will spread the risk. We've been inundated with interest from potential funders and we're stretching every sinew to ensure we'll be able to restore our position as a lender shortly."



Members of golf clubs who have a credit agreement with Zebra Finance have been told they will need to continue paying by direct debit, irrespective of the issues the company is facing.

Zebra Finance's website states: 'Zebra Finance continues to operate to service existing customers. Your credit agreement with Zebra Finance is still live and you will need to continue paying by direct debit. Zebra Finance will

continue to collect your payments as normal. This will be by direct debit and will show as RRSZebra on your bank statement.

'If you are an auto renewal customer, your credit agreement will not be renewed. You will need to contact your club to arrange alternative payment methods for your season ticket / golf membership.'

*To find out about some of the options available to golf clubs in the wake of this news, please turn to page 18*



# Golf recommended to reduce stress

A **psychologist** has championed the role golf can play in reducing stress and supporting good mental health.

Professor Jenny Roe, environmental psychologist and director of the Center for Design & Health, University of Virginia, says golf is one way of benefiting from a regular 'dose' of green space to boost psychological wellbeing and physical health.

"I think to get out and play golf you are really helping manage your

mental health in a very holistic way," she said.

"There's a wealth of evidence to show the benefits of 'green exercise' – exercise in the natural outdoors – compared to exercise indoors, including the gym.

"When you step into a green space, there's a number of things that happen with both your physiology and your psychology. Your parasympathetic nervous system kicks in – the system that's associated with relaxation – and

your stress physiology actually changes. You manage stress more efficiently when you are in a green space.

"Contact with nature allows us to recover from brain fatigue, reduces our stress levels and improves our mood. In turn, improved mood is linked to what's called the 'broaden and build' hypothesis, with an increased capacity for creative thought and cognitive flexibility that can – potentially – lead to new thought-action repertoires on and off the golf course."



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## Aylesbury Park closes 'due to HS2'

A Buckinghamshire golf club that the HS2 railway line was due to slice through has closed down.

According to local radio station *mix 96*, 'the move seems sudden'.

It adds that the club had been in discussion with HS2 for a while.

In a statement, Gareth James Lewis of Lewis Business Recovery and Insolvency said: "Whilst discussions and negotiations with HS2 were ongoing, without formal agreement, the directors regrettably had no alternative but to place the company into administration.

"The administrator will continue those negotiations with HS2 in relation to future occupation of the land, but the business will cease to trade."

One golfer messaged *The Golf Business* to state: 'The club has been unable to invest as members have left as its back nine will be decimated by HS2.'

## Club wins grant to attract juniors

South Moor Golf Club in Durham has won the backing of a community trust to help bring new players into the game.

The club hopes the money could even help it find a star of the future.

Officials at South Moor have won a £500 grant from the Project Genesis Trust, which helps groups and funds regeneration projects in Derwentside, a district in Durham.

The club will use the cash to reach out to local schools and offer fun coaching sessions for beginners.

Club chairman Guy Carr said: "Most of the students will never have been exposed to the game, and the funds will be used to expose them to something other than football. We need to start early to identify and nurture talent and primary school is the ideal time to do this."





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## Golf club forms ice hockey partnership

A Shropshire golf club has agreed a partnership with a local ice hockey club that has two teams.

The deal will see Telford Hotel & Golf Resort's branding on rinkside hoardings at both Telford Tigers 1 and Telford Tigers 2, which compete in the National Ice Hockey League Moralee N1 and National Ice Hockey League Laidler N2 Divisions respectively.

The golf club will also advertise special offers for the Tigers' fanbase.

Telford Hotel & Golf Resort's general manager, Brett Davidge, explained: "This is all about us continuing our work within the local community. The Telford Tigers have been in the town for more than 30 years, so like us, it is a well-established fixture in the community.

"Telford Ice Rink is also great family-friendly hub in the town and we felt this sponsorship was a great opportunity to communicate with the loyal fan base, which is drawn from across Shropshire, mid-Wales, the West Midlands and beyond."

Telford Tigers' general manager and head coach, Tom Watkins, and marketing manager, Ian Howells, said they were pleased to put pen to paper on a deal which will last into the 2019/20 season, when the Tigers hope to be playing in the new top division of the National Ice Hockey League.

Watkins said: "I've been a golf club member at the Telford Hotel & Golf Resort for more than 10 years now and can highly recommend all the facilities."

This is not the first time a golf club has formed a partnership with an ice hockey team. For example, Oxford Golf Club worked with Oxford City Stars, which has seen it advertise on their premises and offer a 'nine holes and a pint for £12' summer promotion, while Renfrew Golf Club once affiliated with the Braehead Clan.

That deal saw its players receive temporary membership of Renfrew, the club was promoted to the team's thousands of supporters via trackside advertising and Renfrew's members received hospitality tickets to attend Braehead Clan games.



# Grange Park to invest in lodges

The 18-hole golf club Grange Park, in Lincolnshire, has been sold to a family that has said it will invest in the facility.

John and Georgina Aisthorpe, together with their two children Jake and Amelia, have been described by their bank as 'an entrepreneurial family with a proven track record of owning and managing successful businesses across the UK'.

They are taking over the 148-acre facility from its previous owner. The family secured a six-figure commercial mortgage to fund part of the purchase.

John and Georgina have successfully owned and managed other large-scale leisure businesses, including Merry Hill Country Park in Norwich, Croft Bank Holiday Park in Skegness and Kirkstead Bridge Holiday & Residential Park in Lincolnshire.

Grange Park is a large attraction that provides overnight

accommodation, tennis courts, weddings, function rooms and private parties as well as golf.

'An immediate area of focus for the family is to build on the park's existing facilities, including its portfolio of lodges available for overnight guests. The new owners are building an additional 14 lodges, increasing accommodation capacity by 80 per cent, said a spokesman for HSBC.

'Over the next five years, the family hopes to grow the park's existing customer base by expanding its facilities and maintaining its reputation for delivering excellent customer service. The high demand for sports and leisure facilities provides an exceptional platform from which to grow the business.'

John Aisthorpe said: "With a large amount of commercial experience and a burning desire to succeed, Georgina and I wanted a new challenge. With the support of our two children, we hope to create a family business that provides guests with long-lasting memories.

"We're already in the early stages of developing new accommodation and we will continue to strategically develop the park's 148 acre site."



---

## Clubs to fund improvements via housing

Two golf clubs hope to fund essential improvements by having housing built around their courses.

Prenton Golf Club in Merseyside has submitted plans to its local council about the building of more than 20 homes, plus a new clubhouse and changes to the course.

The 22 'executive-style' homes will face the course's signature hole. The site currently comprises the existing clubhouse and car park.

Part of the course will be remodelled with the planned clubhouse in a new location that will maximise views over the golf course.

Gareth Irwin, general manager, said: "This is an opportunity to bring improvements to the golf experience that will enhance the reputation of the club and attract more members and visitors, thus ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the business."

Meanwhile, a plan to build nearly 200 homes on a part of a Scottish golf course will create funding for the course to be redesigned so it can remain an 18-hole venue.

Housebuilder Stewart Milne Homes wants to construct about 190 homes at Ballumbie Castle Golf Club. The land earmarked for the homes is currently occupied by three of the club's 18 holes.

Stewart Milne initially told locals who turned up at a consultation event last year that the plan was to downsize the course to nine holes, potentially with the inclusion of a driving range.

However, the club's course manager, Allan Bange, said it is the club's intention to find a way to retain 18 holes should the plan go ahead.

He said: "We are, in effect, losing three holes but there will be a redevelopment of the course to keep it an 18-hole golf course."

A local newspaper report stated: 'We understand the landowner has pledged to reinvest cash from the sale of the land to Stewart Milne into redevelopment of the course.'



# North Wales named golf club of the year



**North Wales** Golf Club has been named Wales Golf Club of the Year.

The club, which increased membership by

237 over the last two years, with the average age of playing members dropping from 62 to 47 years-old, also recently

became a Golf Foundation HSBC Golf Roots Centre.

The club's coaching team provides either free or low-cost lessons to approximately 250 children a week, including those with disabilities, with almost half being girls. It is also a Wales Golf Girls Hub club.

General manager Phil Beard said: "A lot of our members will be shocked because a lot of the good work goes on behind the scenes. This is a tremendous opportunity for the club to actually shout about something and get the members behind what we are doing."

*For more on this, turn to page 42*

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## Would having BST all year be good for golf?

The chief executive of the UK Golf Federation has said that golf participation in the UK would be boosted if British Summer Time (BST) was adopted for the whole 12 months of the year.

Doug Poole's comments come as the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament have supported a proposal to end seasonal time changes by 2021, while still leaving member states the freedom to decide their standard time. This comes after a poll of nearly five million people found 84 per cent of citizens in the EU were in favour of discontinuing biannual clock changes.

"Maybe a hot potato that could help simulate golf participation," he said.

"Further to this decision taken by the



European Parliament, it raises the question of its impact on golf participation and is no doubt relevant to participation in sport in general and also leisure activity in the UK as a whole.

"As operators of golf facilities, the UK Golf Federation would see some really good reasons for supporting keeping BST all year round.

"The extra one hour a day during the

winter months would help stimulate all areas of participation, plus fitness and health and prove environmentally acceptable as driving ranges would be using less power, savings in cost could be as high as £2,000 per quarter, this is a lot of units!

"While there is a long way to go on any final decision, it would seem clear that keeping BST could help our aims of growing golf participation and also saving valuable resources of energy."

Poole called for sport's governing bodies to investigate this further, and for the All-Party Parliamentary Golf Group to get behind it – even though the government has so far suggested it is not willing to change the current make-up.

## Lancashire club establishes equal playing rights



**A 113-year-old** Lancashire club has established equal playing rights and privileges for both male and female members of

the club for the first time in its history.

The change at Walmersley Golf Club means full membership will cost the same for men and women, and although this means a subscription rise for some ladies it also ensures there are no restrictions on when they can play at the club.

Lady captain Helen Parkinson said: "If the game of golf seeks to move forward it needs to change with society and give equal opportunities to everyone regardless of gender.

"We have found in the past that it is quite difficult to recruit women for various reasons. For example, the time element is mentioned, particularly for those who have work or family to care for.

"Playing after work is not always possible while the alternative of playing on a Sunday has not always been popular as this is seen as a family day. So being able to play at any time, even a few holes, will make the game more accessible.

"A big part of what it will mean at Walmersley is full acceptance for the women as equal to the men. It was clear that differences in attitude towards men and women were not acceptable in the 21st century, particularly to younger golfers.

"The women will now pay the same fees but consider this a huge step forward. Everyone knows all members are truly equal with no restrictions on playing times or access to various aspects of club life."

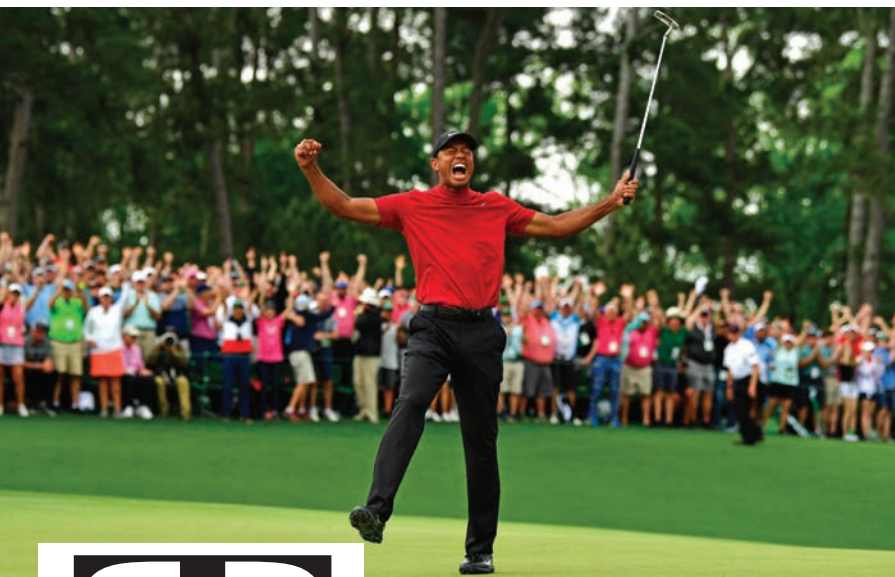
Helen Searle, club support officer for the Lancashire Golf Development Group and England Golf, added: "Women's golf is a tough nut to crack, but creating a more welcoming environment is the first hurdle to overcome."



in their own words

# Nick Pink

chief executive of England Golf



T

hank you Tiger Woods! Your historic victory in The Masters has given a fantastic kickstart to golf as the season unfolds.

The excitement and interest which Tiger generated with his win is a great buzz for golf. What's important now is

that we harness it to grow the game and I believe we're ready to do exactly that.

Our research paints a very positive picture of golf which reflects the way the game is changing to become more welcoming, more inclusive, more accessible. In short, a sport for all.

People today want to play golf in many different ways. They want to fit it into a busy life, to find a format that suits all the family, to enjoy the game while meeting and socialising with friends. The good news is that golf is responding to these trends.

We know from our research that more clubs than ever before are offering beginner sessions and flexible membership offers. It's proving a very successful approach. Our latest club questionnaire, which we carry out every two years, showed an increase in average membership from 460 to 484, between 2016 and 2018.

General participation is growing too. We've measured this across the UK for the past two years and our latest figures show that 4.2 million adults played

**The interest Tiger generated with his win is a great buzz for golf – at a time when the number of adults playing on a full length course has risen from 3.69 million to 4.2 million in the last year**

on a full length course in the last year. That's up from 3.69 million in the previous 12 months.

At the same time the numbers playing nine-hole golf are shooting up, underlining the great appetite for short format golf.

Competitive golf in England is also exciting, and there's much home-grown success to inspire our ambitious young players. Justin Rose features at the top of the world rankings, Georgia Hall holds our latest Major, and English golfers account for 19 per cent of this season's European Tour players and 16 per cent of the Ladies European Tour.

The Tiger effect can only help us to build on these very sound foundations as we emphasise the relevance of the game. For example, how it teaches life skills to youngsters, helps families spend time together and offers

health benefits to people of all ages.

Our #SwitchOffWithGolf campaign, which we are running across the summer, highlights the wellbeing benefits of the game and encourages people to relax with golf. It doesn't have to take much time, 30 minutes on the driving range can be a real stress-buster.

Meanwhile, the Tiger effect coincides with major changes in golf designed to make the game more user-friendly.

These include the introduction of the new *Rules of Golf* and next year's launch of the World Handicap System, which bring challenges and opportunities. At England Golf we have been preparing for all that lies ahead by taking a hard look at ourselves. We move forward as a streamlined and more cost-effective organisation which will be able to offer greater value to members. I'll be able to tell you more about our plans next time. Until then, let's all make the most of the Tiger effect. TGB

For more information, visit [www.englandgolf.org](http://www.englandgolf.org)

# Sound bites

**The average golf club's food and beverage operation has changed significantly in the last 10 years. Here, Steven Brown, describes that transformation and explores what else the industry still needs to do to maximise profitability**

**I** have been working in food and beverage for over 40 years and for 20 of them in the golfing community. As I reflect upon those 20 years I have arrived at the startling conclusion that while a lot of progress has been made, we, as an industry, have much to do to keep pace with the progress of high street food and beverage outlets.

I have never found a club that is delivering, controlling and maximising its food and beverage operation to a point where improvement, however slight, cannot be made. This is not a criticism of clubs and their approach to their food and beverage units, merely an observation from an independent, interested party with practical experience of advising clubs on how to maximise their potential, and hopefully their profits.

Since joining the industry I quickly realised that I needed to relearn everything I knew about managing, controlling and operating a golf club's food and beverage unit when compared to the high street retailing units I had previously worked with.

Common control processes such as the setting of viable wage levels, the correct calculation of overall gross margins (not guessed at), the control of wastage levels and the critical importance of yields had seemingly not figured greatly in golf clubs' list of prioritising actions. I discovered very quickly, understandably, that the main driving force for clubs was the generation of new memberships and, in many cases, the driving of green fee revenue, leaving the food and beverage operation to hopefully make a positive contribution to the club's bottom line.

Then the world changed in 2008/9 when pressure was put on every business to ensure that every unit of their business strove to make a positive contribution to their overall business. Golf clubs were no exception.

What has changed in the last 10 years or so?

I thought it might be of interest to highlight some of the changes that have occurred in golf club's food and beverage units that are now becoming the norm, as managers strive to control, restructure and redirect their food and

**We, as an industry,  
have much to do to keep  
pace with the progress of  
high street food and  
beverage outlets**



beverage business, some, it must be said, with great results, turning around once unprofitable units into positive, profit centres in their own right.

Here is a summary of my voyage of discovery in food and beverage in the golfing community:

## **In-house versus external contactors (franchising)**

In all truth this subject, even 20 years later, forms the most oft-requested use of my services and my consultancy time with my clients.

We still have a slight bias towards in-house services versus the external supply, but more and more clubs are now reviewing the process and in particular the terms of their agreements.

Twenty years ago the external contractor paid little or no rent, utilities were paid for by the club, equipment was owned, serviced and replaced by the club, telephone, rates, laundry and uniforms were funded by the clubs and even in some cases there would be a retainer during the winter months.



**Tim  
Atkin MW**

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## bar and restaurant

What has changed? More and more clubs are recognising that these terms are not in the best interest of the club and its members, and that the entire trading model needs to be reviewed. Many clubs are now beginning to access their client's turnover (and even expenses) and are able to justify a 'commercial rent' based upon their declared trading figures and certainly, from my own experience of providing golf clubs with this important data from my consultancy visits, I can categorically state that I am

recommending a complete review of the rental terms to some 80 per cent of my clients who still operate on what I consider to be inequitable terms.

The right document is a must, as failure to identify the total nuances of how the partnership will operate can, and often does, lead to complications. You must maintain control of these operations and not simply abdicate responsibility to them as was the case 20 years ago.

The use of external contractors should provide you with some financial reward to help defray your club's outlay (such as utilities) but,

just as importantly, a level of expertise at operating a complex foods' (and / or bars') unit.

I have no favoured course of actions when recommending what clubs should do (such as take the food and beverage back in-house or the reverse of giving it to a contractor) and for one simple reason – every club's circumstances are both individual and unique.

For some clubs it's all about retaining the profits, or replacing the contractor who is not complying with terms or supplying an inferior level of service. Whichever route you choose, remember this – get the best return





for the club, reduce risk wherever possible, keep control and choose a trading model that acts in the best interests of the club and its members.

## Employment wage costs

I recently visited a client where the wage percentages were 121 per cent.

In normal circumstances this would have left me speechless. It wasn't until I quizzed the client as to why they had such an extraordinarily high figure (the highest I have ever seen) that he informed me that the standard of service at their club was of the highest possible standard as demanded by the membership and he recognised that that comes at a high price. He then informed me that the staff wage cost paled into insignificance when compared to the amount people paid to join the club (in excess of £60,000) and the amount they then paid in annual fees (in excess of £10,000).

In other words, the staff wage percentage was a small price to pay compared to the income levels generated for every new member together with the annual fees.

I wish all my clients were so blessed but, back in the real world, we have to be guided by more prosaic matters – can we afford the staff we have and what should that level be?

Is there an industry norm for this by which clubs can, even at a glance, measure themselves to see if they

are trading profitably?

The short answer is YES – the longer answer is a little more complex in that there are polar extremes.

If your club operates a typical golf club food and beverage snack type menu (and

trust me there is such a thing), has little or no event trade and you

employ a cook not a chef, then typically we look for a 28 to 33 per cent wage cost.

If, at the other end of the spectrum you conduct, say, 100 external functions such as weddings and wakes a year, then expect a wage percentage that ranges from 43 to 63 per cent, or even more.

Remember the figures are only guides and your main responsibility is to provide a level of service that will match or exceed your customers' expectations.

One important point is to make sure that you cost additional staff costs into the price you charge per head or, if not, that you charge a room hire

**I have lost count of the number of clients that have no idea which products they sell generate the highest cash margins**





## bar and restaurant

fee, or, if possible, both! In this way you will keep these wage costs down and pass them onto the hirer.

### Dish costings

After 20 years of beating the drum with clubs about carrying out a dish costing exercise for all the products they sell, I think the message is finally getting through – and it needs to.

I have lost count of the number of clients that have no idea at all about which products they sell generate the highest cash margins. So much so, that I have illustrated, in virtually every club I go into, that the most expensive items on the bar or menu are not necessarily the most profitable. What compounds the situation is that people believe that a higher turnover equates to more profit and that ain't necessarily so. I can make an outlet more profitable in net profit terms from less turnover! Let us not forget that 'turnover is vanity and profit is sanity'.

If your biggest selling products are also your biggest profit earners then you won't have a better opportunity to make a positive contribution to the club's bottom line. If, however, your biggest seller is the least profitable, then something needs to be done to address that situation but you can only do this if you know how to cost a dish, calculate a gross profit, control waste and control all costs related to its provision such as staff wages.

There are so many handy apps that chefs and bar managers can download these days to control this dish costing so there is no excuse for not conducting this exercise, which is the first step to making a profit by control and not by accident.

### Maximising your yield

The yield is a fabulous indicator for a bar's operation to use when assessing how well the unit is performing at buying a product and selling it without losing anything (or at least as little as possible).

If you have an external stock taker they should be generating this figure for you to give an immediate, on-site indication as to how effectively you are trading.

The average yield in golf clubs is between 93 and 96 per



**If your club operates a typical golf club food and beverage snack type menu, has little or no event trade and you employ a cook not a chef, then typically we look for a 28 to 33 per cent wage cost**

cent. In high street pubs (managed houses) the average yield is 101 to 103 per cent, and yours can be too.

Some golf clubs do achieve the high gos and even beyond, but is that a realistic target on a regular basis?

The answer is yes – our target yield for golf clubs with a 50 per cent-plus turnover of draught products is 99 per cent, and is genuinely achievable by careful waste management, correct measuring, heads on pints, shandy sales and various other 'trade tricks' that experienced bar supervisors can apply.

Yield will be badly affected by non-delivery of goods, out of date stocks, excessive waste (for example those above and beyond the accepted industry norms).

So please make sure that your bar manager and their staff are closely monitoring your all-important yield, as a low result can be the first indicator of inefficiency or even nefarious practice in the business.

There is no doubt that in the 20



years I have been advising clubs on food and beverage matters that some giant strides have been made leading to better controlled and more profitable units, but there is still so much more to be done by so many clubs, and that for me is the excitement of the challenge.

I know full well that today's new breed of golf club manager is gearing themselves up for that challenge, because I meet many of them on the Golf Club Managers' Association and Club Managers' Association of Europe courses that I lecture on about food and beverage, and I can see the hunger and appetite that they have for an understanding of the dark arts of food and beverage management, because they understand that change is needed, progress is inevitable and that a food and beverage operation really can become an asset to a golf club in today's competitive market place – and can be a standalone profit centre. TGB

*Steven Brown is a food and beverage consultant to the golf industry.  
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companies agree to step in to help Zebra Finance's customers

## Fairway Credit

**Premium Credit's** market leading brand for collecting payments for golf membership subscriptions, Fairway Credit, has agreed to step in to help after rival Zebra Finance closed for new business in golf membership funding.

Zebra Finance provides financial options to people who buy memberships at more than 200 golf clubs, but recently the company announced that it is no longer accepting credit applications from new or existing golf club customers.

In the aftermath of the news story, a spokesman for Fairway Credit has said: "Golf clubs around the UK will have seen news that Zebra Finance is no longer accepting credit applications from new or existing customers to fund their annual golf membership.

"Since this news broke Fairway Credit has been bombarded with calls from clubs needing help and is once again demonstrating our ability to step in and support both clubs and their members at a moment's notice.

"Fairway Credit have funded golf clubs and their members successfully for over two decades. Whilst other funders have come and gone over that time, none have managed to build

the critical mass of clubs needed to ensure a sustainable model."

The spokesman added that, subject to approval where terms and conditions apply and for over 18s only, Fairway Credit can fund golf clubs' members' annual



subscriptions and additional fees, such as locker fees and bar levies. He said the application process is "simple, online, paperless and membership renewals are simplified – no need to reapply, renewals are completely paperless."

The system is also integrated with Club Systems / HowDoIPay, saving clubs from administration, he added.

"All this from the number one finance provider for golf membership funding in the UK – a quick, simple solution for clubs and their members."

*To understand more about what Fairway Credit can offer, please call 01372 746 073 or email [leisure@pcl.co.uk](mailto:leisure@pcl.co.uk)*

## GolfClubSubs.com

A financial technology company is offering the opportunity for UK golf clubs' members to pay their annual subscriptions via direct debit online.

Daniel Halliday, director of GolfClubSubs, says he's been contacted by UK golf clubs keen to offer direct debits since the Zebra Finance announcement.

"We have a fully automated system that offers direct debit to all golf clubs – including any that are concerned following the recent news about Zebra Finance," he said.

"Our system is ideal for any club that wants to offer direct debit pay monthly without increasing admin time. The system is based entirely online and is completely paperless. The way it works is that the club administrator enters the amount they want to collect and that is the amount received in full into the club bank account. The member is sent an SMS text and email to create their mandate and authorise the subscription on their phone or computer. Each month the system automatically checks with the club's bank to make sure that payments have been completed."

Daniel added that the system, which is cloud-based so the administrator and / or club manager can login from anywhere, highlights failures and automatically sends polite reminders to members where required. It is also administered by a golf club's accounts' team and works alongside any club's current software meaning no golf club has to replace any current systems.

"You can log in from anywhere, reminders are automatic, it's GDPR compliant and fully customisable," he added.

Mark Ruddy CMDip, the golf club manager at Courtown Golf Club, recommends the system. "At Courtown Golf Club, we have been using GolfClubSubs auto direct debit software since 2018," he said. "The paperless sign-up for members has saved us a lot of time and the online reporting functions make it very visible to see projected revenue from our membership. The customer service has also been excellent from the team at GolfClubSubs. I would recommend any club interested in offering a pay monthly solution to their membership to consider GolfClubSubs." For more information, visit [www.golfclubsubs.com](http://www.golfclubsubs.com)

profile

# the manager profile

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# Howard Craft

**The club manager at Berkhamsted Golf Club in Hertfordshire talks to *The Golf Business* about the growing number of golf club managers in their 30s, the challenges involved in maintaining a full membership and an entrance fee in today's climate and what it's like being a former greenkeeper in charge of a golf club that has no bunkers**



Howard Craft.  
All images by Andy Hiseman, unless credited otherwise

**W**ith two older brothers who both played golf, it was natural for eight-year old Howard Craft to start playing too, learning the sport at Ivinghoe GC near Leighton Buzzard and Little Hay GC near Hemel Hempstead.

After playing many sports at school, he did a degree at Swansea University in environmental biology, intending to become an ecologist to work as an ecological surveyor. Post-university, he worked at The Wildlife Trust doing conservation work, and through this secured a greenkeeping job at Mentmore Golf & Country Club, aged 21. After three years there he moved to Redbourn GC as deputy course manager, his first role within BGL Golf. After two years, BGL put him into a *Manager In Training* programme, having seen his potential as a future general manager.

During this period Craft acted as assistant general manager at the group's flagship venue, Burhill Golf Club, giving him his first exposure to life at a high-end members' club. By his late 20s, Craft was running clubs in BGL Golf on an interim basis, and secured his first full-time general manager job at the age of 30, at the group's Ramsdale Park Golf Centre north of Nottingham. Before long he was also managing another BGL Golf site, Wycombe Heights Golf Centre, handling the two roles simultaneously, before switching to a full-time role at Wycombe.

Howard Craft is married with two children, Sebastian (eight) and Oliver (five), and has maintained a keen interest in the natural world following his formal ecological training. When he has time, and is able to seize the TV, he follows rugby and cricket.

He is a member of the Golf Club Managers' Association, and is currently on the Club Managers' Association of



Europe's Certified Club Manager programme, in pursuit of the Club Manager Diploma.

On January 8, 2018, Craft arrived as club manager at Berkhamsted Golf Club, aged just 33.

**Last year you joined Berkhamsted Golf Club after nearly a decade at BGL. Why the change?**

At that point in my career, in my early 30s, I had learnt an enormous amount from BGL, and I will be eternally grateful for what they did in terms of building up my knowledge. It was a great business to be part of, and the Manager In Training programme introduced me to many different aspects of golf club management – I would recommend it to anybody. Through it BGL Golf shows great trust and commitment to developing their employees.

But I felt I needed to experience the other side of the golf industry at a private club. I'd always admired Berkhamsted Golf Club, having grown up in the area, and when I saw the job advertised I wasn't even looking for a new position – but I thought it was an opportunity too good to turn down really.

I grew up in Buckinghamshire and went to school in Hertfordshire, and Berkhamsted was always seen as the pinnacle of golf clubs around the area. I learnt to play golf, as a lot of kids do, at a small nine-holer – in my case Ivinghoe GC near Leighton Buzzard in Bucks, but Berkhamsted was regarded as the best in the area.

**For someone who's quite an experienced golf club manager, you're still very young! How have you achieved career progression so quickly, do you think we're seeing more young golf club managers and, if so, is that a good thing?**

I actually thought that my relative youth may have been an issue for Berkhamsted, but that wasn't what I found during the recruitment process. My knowledge of the food and beverage side of the job, where I was well-trained at BGL, certainly helped me progress my career when talking to Berkhamsted. Food and beverage is a significant factor in a golf club's finances, of course, and a general manager has to know how to run it properly. It's a very transferable skill, whether you're at a proprietary club or a private one. You have

to improve service and quality while keeping the figures under control, and I came to Berkhamsted with a very solid food and beverage grounding after my BGL training.

I think the younger club managers in this industry are bringing a slightly different skillset. The arrival of a younger generation of club managers is a sign that the whole industry is evolving. There are more people in their 30s now who see golf club management as a fundamental career in itself, rather than coming to it after a career elsewhere such as in the armed forces or in industry. People are seeing how you can develop a career by working in different golf clubs, which I see as a very positive thing for the industry in the long run.

There is also a welcome rise in the number of female general managers in UK golf. While I was at BGL there were several experienced female general managers including Melanie Drake and Emma Clifford. I think it is crucial for the game to attract more women to club management.

**You've been running clubs over a period of time that's seen significant change within the industry, but how do you think the role of the golf club manager has changed over that time?**

There is a growing percentage golf clubs being run on a proprietary basis here in the UK, rather than being run by

the members, so more general managers than ever before are focused on the profit and loss account. The job is perhaps moving away from the more traditionally administrative role where golf club secretaries dealt with club competitions and matches, and other things closer to the sport itself. But here at Berkhamsted, which is a more traditional private golf club, you definitely need the skillset to do

**The arrival of a younger generation of club managers is a sign that the whole industry is evolving**





both. You need to understand things like human resources and compliance with health and safety regulations, just as much as being able to engage with customers, and having the greenkeeping knowledge to be able to take decisions on the quality of the golf course.

Another change has been the introduction of new technology to assist the general manager in running a golf club. We use intelligentgolf here at Berkhamsted, for example. We have full web access, I have all the reports I require at the touch of a button, and the members can use it to book into competitions, check their handicaps and so on. We're trying to reduce our use of paper, printing out as little as possible; it's all electronic now.

### **What do you think are your biggest challenges at Berkhamsted Golf Club?**

Out on the golf course, the biggest challenge is dealing with golfers' expectations as regards course conditioning, while an increasing number of tools such as fungicides and insecticides are being removed from the market owing to new legislation.

It's getting harder and harder for course managers to do their jobs with less resources available to them. That is definitely a challenge.

At Berkhamsted we have made huge strides over the last year in our food and beverage service, and the

challenge is now to continue that speed of improvement – if you keep on raising your customers' expectations, then you also have to keep on innovating and providing them with ever-higher standards in that department.

We are also seeing significant cost pressures from our suppliers; my job is to challenge them, and to make sure we are paying the right price to maintain our profit margins. But at the same time you want to build loyalty and good relationships with those suppliers. However, I feel a strong sense of duty to our members as we are effectively spending their money on the upkeep and services at the golf club. Clearly it's about finding the best value of money for the members, rather than finding the cheapest supplier for everything.

Another challenge is the crowded marketplace that we find ourselves in, here in the south east.

Berkhamsted does have quite a unique proposition with a classic heathland golf course rated inside *England's Top 100*, which is to our advantage, and we put that message out there. We are fortunate in that our membership is full, and we have a very strong and loyal support from our members. There is a sound financial basis to the club each year. But in terms of achieving the desired level of society and green fee business, that is always a challenge. We have a price point to maintain which we feel represents the value of playing golf at Berkhamsted, in a market where many clubs discount in order to satisfy people's financial needs, so we don't play the price game too much.

We still charge an entrance fee when new members join Berkhamsted, and we don't offer discounted membership incentives. We manage our yields from things like golf days very carefully – we may do a deal on a Monday afternoon, but not on a Friday in June or July. We have limited opportunities for societies to play here, but of course we do have various off-peak times which we try to manage intelligently.

We like to showcase what you uniquely get when you visit Berkhamsted, rather than selling it as a commodity to be compared on a price basis against other 18-hole experiences.





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**When you took over Berkhamsted Golf Club you said you wanted to make it the best possible club for its members.**

**What have you been doing to help achieve that?**

If I could summarise what I think our members want at this club, in one word, it would be 'pride'.

Members want to feel proud when they bring their guests to their golf club, and therefore I see my role is to provide that quality and service which makes people feel proud of Berkhamsted. Not only proud to play the course, which is special, but also when they walk into the clubhouse to entertain their guests.

So when I arrived I immediately conducted a comprehensive member survey, which gave me and the management committee an insight into what people really thought about their golf club. It's vital to avoid any disconnect between club management and the members, so we have listened a lot over the last year and have genuinely taken much of the members' feedback on. The majority of change was created after getting that feedback. It is good to be ranked inside England's top 100, for example, and one naturally works at that aspect, but member satisfaction is always the number one priority at Berkhamsted.

I use the Net Promoter Score index to measure our customer satisfaction and loyalty on a daily basis. This is a continuous-feedback management tool which I used at BGL Golf. It gives you a quantifiable figure whereby you can gauge trends and work out if what you are doing is having an impact on your members' satisfaction.

**The course is highly rated and famous for a number of things, including some of the names that designed it and its lack of bunkers; can you describe the course to us?**

We like to say that, at Berkhamsted, you are playing 'golf as nature intended'. We have no man-made hazards here. We have a lot of heather, a lot of gorse. We're a heathland course, which is a rarity in Hertfordshire. We take pride in creating a traditional golf experience – we don't try to produce lush green fairways, we focus instead on producing natural surfaces where you need to play traditional shots like the bump and run. It's not target golf! It's not the

longest golf course, but if you miss the fairway you are punished. It's definitely not a pushover, and our members' handicaps travel very well.

Actually it's not technically correct to say we have no man-made hazards. We have various bomb craters here, from back when Berkhamsted Common was used for army training during the Boer War and the First World War, including mortar training and tank driving which certainly created an interesting landscape for golf.

We also have Grim's Dyke, which is man-made as well although admittedly it's an earthwork from the Bronze Age. Similar ditches stretch throughout quite a lot of England's south east, and although their purpose is uncertain they probably served to demarcate territory. Our version, which starts north of here in the Chilterns, runs through several of our holes. You're hitting over Grim's Dyke onto a green several times at Berkhamsted. We work closely with Historic England to ensure that we don't contaminate the Dyke, and feel a sense of obligation that we are there to preserve the landscape.

We also have a Roman villa on site: this was excavated in the 1930s by pupils at the local school.

**Given how successful Berkhamsted is without having bunkers – and how expensive and time consuming they can be to maintain – should some cash-strapped clubs consider reducing the number of bunkers they have?**

If you ask a lot of club managers what their customers' biggest gripe is, it's usually bunkers. They are hard to maintain, it is hard to get a consistent playing surface and depth of sand, then there are matters like drainage, stone contamination and keeping the edges trim. As a former greenkeeper I know how hard it is to get bunkers pristine! Without investing in expensive lining and fresh sand it is very hard to please people with them. I'd say look at the playability of your golf course. Bunkers are difficult, they slow down a round. Does that bunker serve a purpose in its location? If it isn't impacting the round for most golfers, ask yourself, is it necessary? Or could it more easily be a grass bunker, which is easier to maintain? So I







## The 60th Berkhamsted Trophy



**Harpenden's Joss Gosling** implemented a smart irons-only game plan in winning this year's 60th Berkhamsted Trophy at Berkhamsted Golf Club.

In the 72 holes, the ex-Texas University college golf star didn't hit a single driver or wood of any kind, resulting in better accuracy off the tee and an average of 14 greens in regulation in each of the event's four rounds.

His strategy was also used 42 years ago by another young amateur golfer, who went on to be Masters champion just 11 years later – Sandy Lyle.

Gosling, who was taking part in his first Berkhamsted Trophy, was the only player to break par as, once again, the 6,605 yard par 71 bunker-free layout at Berkhamsted proved more than a match for 99 of the country's best amateur golfers.

"While other golfers played more aggressively, I hit two irons and four irons off the tee throughout the tournament, and made a lot of greens in regulation," he said.

Gosling spent five years in the USA on a golf scholarship at the University of Texas at Arlington, as a sociology major. Upon his return to the UK in May 2016 he briefly turned professional, before injury forced him back to the amateur ranks.

A lifelong member of Harpenden Golf Club, Gosling has close family who are members at Berkhamsted. "The members run the Berkhamsted Trophy brilliantly, and are extremely welcoming to everyone" he said. "The tournament is presented very professionally, and the atmosphere is similar to playing in a top college event in the United States".



Joss Gosling.  
Image by Ian Hall

would certainly advocate losing bunkers if there's a case for it.

However, this doesn't mean that the Berkhamsted greens' team have an easy life! We hand-cut our tees and approaches here, it is a very labour-intensive golf course to maintain. We have a lot of small yet acutely-sloped natural mounds here, as many golfers will know. They are one of the signature aspects of the golf course, and they all need cutting by hand with hover mowers, so the labour time we gain on not having bunkers we lose again on keeping our mounds and hollows around the greens. We tend not to have large-scale mowers out there, the vast majority is hand-cutting at Berkhamsted.

### The club is famous for The Berkhamsted Trophy – can you tell us a bit about this?

It was started 60 years ago by Harold Rance, a very long-standing club member. His name's all over our honours' boards – he won at least 50 significant club events. The Berkhamsted Trophy is an elite men's amateur event, run by our members. It used to be a one-day 36-hole event in March, but a few years ago we moved it to April, registered it as a World Amateur Rankings qualifying event, and in 2016 it became a three-day 72-hole event.

It now stands as the most significant early-season elite men's event in the annual England Golf calendar. Former winners include

Sandy Lyle, Luke Donald, Gary Wolstenholme, Andy Sullivan, Tom Lewis, Graeme Storm and Peter McEvoy, and despite our relatively short length and lack of bunkers, Berkhamsted never gets taken apart! In fact over the last two decades the average winners' scores have gone up, not down.

We are all tremendously proud to host it each year, and being the venue for an event of the trophy's pedigree is a big part of why Berkhamsted is so desirable to visitors.

**Last year the club appointed an external marketing agency, Magic**

**Hour Media. How does having a company like this help the club to attract potential new members and visitors, and retain existing ones?**

We used external agencies at BGL both for PR and for digital marketing. As a general manager you wear many hats, but sometimes you need to pay for specialists to get a job done properly. I also try to quantify the time it would take me to do that part of the job, and it would probably take me much longer to create those stories, adverts and marketing collateral. So I see it as good value for money.



## How Royal Cinque Ports is becoming a 'bucket list destination'

[reesinkturfcare.co.uk](http://reesinkturfcare.co.uk)

Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club course manager James Bledge is on a mission to make the club a 'bucket list destination', choosing to invest in the complete Toro Total Solutions package to help it get there.

Regarded as one of the finest links courses in England, Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club in Kent has been impressing members and tournament players for 126 years and key to that longevity is the club's determination for continuous improvement and investment. Most recently that has involved the club signing its second five-year machinery agreement plan with Toro, as well as installing a new Toro irrigation system.



James explains: "We want to make this course a bucket list destination for golfers and to do that investing in our course maintenance is vital."

This is the second Toro machinery package the club has invested in says James and when it came to investing again Toro easily came out on top in a series of demonstrations.

"With our first Toro fleet we saw a real improvement and you wonder if that could happen again. But it has," says James. "Toro is an innovator and that never changes, the product just keeps getting better."

Once the decision to go with Toro again had been made, the greenkeeping team and James put together their 'dream package' which includes four Greensmaster Flex 2120 pedestrian mowers, a Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder and three Greensmaster TriFlex 3420 mowers to name just a few, in addition to three Greensmaster 1000 pedestrian mowers and a Groundsmaster 4500-D purchased from the club's previous fleet.

With the decision made on machinery next up was who to trust with irrigating the course. "The quality of the machines is fantastic, and we saw the same with the irrigation system," says James. "It became clear that the Total Solutions package was the best way to get our course to where we want it to be."



## profile

**Many golf clubs are relatively active on Facebook and Twitter, and most club managers have a LinkedIn account. Last year Berkhamsted joined Instagram and has been quite proactive on it since – how's that working out for you? Have you exploited a potential gap in the market?**

In my recent roles elsewhere, 95 per cent of our marketing was digital, primarily through Facebook and Google AdWords. I look at social media slightly differently now, at Berkhamsted. Here it is more about creating engaging content for our members to see. So at a function we may share an Instagram photo of a dish which our head chef has produced, for example. We don't tend to use social media to try and sell the club to visitors, particularly. Instead, the content which we create tends to be shared by our members with their friends, so it is more an indirect sales tool.

I'd recommend having a social media presence, but you need to first understand what you are doing it for rather than just jumping on there and posting content every single day.

**Is Berkhamsted trying to attract more women and juniors to the facility?**

Yes, certainly. We've had a successful ladies' academy for several years, but recently we have reorganised it and are now putting on a large extra amount of complimentary lessons for ladies to get their handicaps. Ours is a tough



**When I arrived I immediately conducted a comprehensive member survey, which gave me and the management committee an insight into what people really thought about their golf club**

course to learn to play on, but with the support of John Clarke, our head pro, our lady captain and ladies' committee, feedback has been very positive and we've seen a recent increase in uptake of new lady golfers coming to Berkhamsted.

A lot of our junior members, as at many clubs, are related to an existing adult member. I see it as the club providing a service for members' children and grandchildren. We allocate a percentage of adult member competition entry fees to supporting our juniors, so we provide complimentary lessons and support our junior team when they play matches. We are also in the process of restructuring our junior operations in a similar way to our ladies' academy section.

In recent years we have seen some fantastically talented juniors come through the ranks at Berkhamsted – most notably Alice Hewson who recently finished a superb T10 in the inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur tournament, held on the



weekend before The Masters. Alice is a Curtis Cup player, currently at college in the USA, and the whole club will be excited to see what happens when she eventually becomes a full-time tour pro.

We also have Hannah Screen who represents Berkhamsted GC when she plays for England, and we also have another England International in young Ben Pierleoni who came through our junior programme. We don't go for quantity with juniors at Berkhamsted, but we certainly produce quality! We'll be supportive as they all progress their careers in golf.

## **What is the club doing to enhance profitability of its food and beverage operation?**

This was one of the major items I was tasked with when I started at Berkhamsted.

I always feel that when someone joins a private members' club they feel it is 'my club', so we should not only provide what members want, but we should also offer our menu at an advantageous price. In other words we need to supply our members with a restaurant-quality experience, without charging full high street prices. That can be a challenge, but after my first year we have made significant improvements in this area.

For example, we now make all of our own bread in-house. We have a very talented head chef and kitchen team, and they produce delicious 'Berkhamsted Bread Rolls'. Also, although a lot of golf clubs have

recently gone away from offering a traditional Sunday lunch menu owing to a lack of support, we have gone the opposite way by putting this back into our schedule – which has increased our revenue, as well as increasing our margin and indeed the quality of the Sunday lunch itself. This came directly from member feedback – they didn't mind paying a little more provided the quality was there. This is very satisfying for the whole team! It's been a win-win all round.

It's a similar thing with the bar. We work with brands which we feel are suitable for the club's positioning at the connoisseur's end of the game in the south east. For example we have a large gin selection, over 35 choices, and again that is based on member feedback. Many of our traditional lager-drinking male golfers have moved onto gin, as a result.

To sum it up, we try to provide quality, and to do something different from other golf clubs. And this brings us back to the pride which our members feel at belonging to Berkhamsted Golf Club – it definitely applies to our food and beverage service too.

**We don't tend to use social media to try and sell the club to visitors, particularly. Instead, the content which we create tends to be shared by our members with their friends**





**In your time at BGL you became an expert in budgeting – do you have any advice for fellow golf club managers about this area?**

Try breaking it down to three areas: people, product and profit. In that order of priority. Your people are always key to any golf club, including both staff and members. If my staff are doing their jobs properly, the members will be happy. Get your people right and you're fundamentally okay.

Then you work on your golf course and the food and beverage. If both of those products are there, the profit – and the budget – should look after

itself. But it has to be sustainable. You need to spend money where it needs to be spent, rather than always cost-cutting, and always try to remove volatility out of your profit and loss. In golf, you never know what the weather will bring, so ask yourself how do I mitigate against, for example, unseasonably wet weather in my budget plans? If your club is relatively rich in capital, like many still are, you have to continuously reinvest in your golf course and your clubhouse.

Our financial year matches the calendar year, and I quote enjoy the annual budgeting process. It gives you the time to sit back and think long and hard about the



club, where it is currently, where you want it to be next year, and how the business plan looks. What are your club objectives? Don't just look at last year and add a bit on!

With a committee, such as we have here at Berkhamsted, sometimes it can be hard to maintain continuity and stick to a constant agreed direction across multiple years. This is something we work on here at Berkhamsted, taking care to ensure that our key strategic investments are clearly agreed. We have to spend our members' money wisely, and we have a clear five-year plan.

For example, we recently invested circa £350,000 in a new golf course irrigation system, and further clubhouse refurbishments are likely to ensure that we can provide what's needed over the next 20 years.

**We have a large gin selection, over 35 choices,  
and again that is based on member feedback**



## profile

**Berkhamsted's golf course has famously been relatively untouched for decades now. Are there any major course changes planned in the future, to account for changes in the modern game?**

We don't have any fundamental course changes planned, as this is natural Berkhamsted after all, but we do have an extensive heather regeneration project ongoing which is a source of pride to us all.

Our course manager, Gerald Bruce, has been here over 30 years, and our chairman of greens has been involved with that side of the club for many years now. They take a long-term view of things. We work with the STRI to keep ourselves informed about the condition of our golf course.

And I can confirm that there are no plans to introduce bunkers at Berkhamsted!



**The Berkhamsted Trophy**

The feedback we have is that the golf course improves every year, in terms of condition.

And if you look at the scores from the annual Berkhamsted Trophy, despite new golf technology and stronger, fitter golfers, nobody ever takes the course apart and average winning scores have actually risen, not fallen, if you compare the last two decades. It is standing up well to the test of time.

**In your still relatively short time at Berkhamsted, has Brexit impacted on the club?**

I'll not reveal my political views here, but I feel confident that our supply chain won't be too badly disrupted by it. I don't foresee a significant downturn in business as a result. As a golf club manager it's not front of mind every day! Are people more likely to look inside the UK for their next golf holiday, while there is Brexit uncertainty! Yes, that might be the case. We take annual bookings from people booking high-quality golf tours and logically people may be, for the time being, looking a bit closer to home while it all sorts itself out.

**Course manager Gerald Bruce**







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## profile

**As regards ethnic diversity, how would you rate Berkhamsted's game as regards embracing other cultures and ethnicities which are different to the traditional English golfing audience?**

We do have a diverse range of members, and we work hard to improve our standing in the local community. We don't ask our members for their nationality, for example.

**What is the current membership size at Berkhamsted Golf Club?**

Including social members we currently have just under 800, which perfectly suits a club of this size. In April 2019 we re-introduced a waiting list for new members, which I think shows that we are in good health as a club, as regards demand for memberships.

I realise that we are in a relatively fortunate position to be able to run a waiting list, but I like to think it is due at least in part to the changes which we've made here in the last year or so, after our member survey. People do talk widely to each other, away from the golf club, and I feel that our word-of-mouth is very positive at the moment.

**What can a group expect from a golf day at Berkhamsted, and how do you look after customers who arrive in a group?**

They expect a quality experience from the moment they arrive. From the moment of booking, Janet Proudfoot, Assistant Club Manager, is very experienced and looks after exactly what they need. Les, our starter, gives every arriving group a personal touch, and looks after them on the

day itself, and they are guaranteed a great breakfast (with that wonderful Berkhamsted Bread) which may be different to what they are used to at other golf clubs. Also, our head pro, John Clarke, has been here for over 30 years, and is a well-known local golfing personality who is very good at giving visitors the essence of golf at Berkhamsted. Most of all they can expect a memorable golf course which is different from almost every other one in having no bunkers and being entirely natural!

TGB

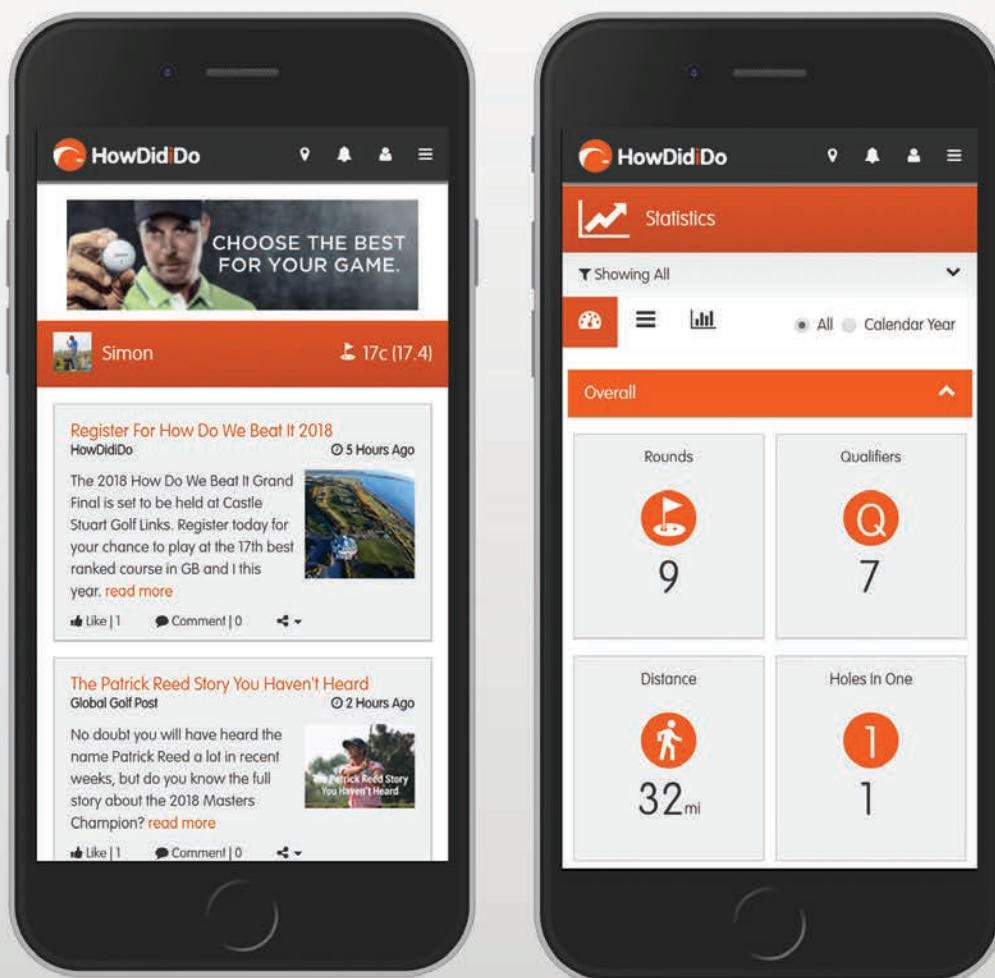
Contact: Howard Craft,  
Berkhamsted Golf Club,  
01442 865832,  
[howard@berkhamstedgc.co.uk](mailto:howard@berkhamstedgc.co.uk)

**We are in a relatively fortunate position to be able to run a waiting list, but I think it is due at least in part to the changes we've made after our member survey**





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# Employment Law - the importance of carrying out a reasonable investigation



A

**recent employment** tribunal case has underlined the importance of the investigation stage in disciplinary proceedings for golf club employers.

A 61-year-old diabetic bus driver was dismissed by his employer, First Essex Buses Limited, following his failure of a drugs test where he had

tested positive for cocaine. The employment tribunal, however, found that his dismissal was unfair.

Mr Ball was selected to undergo a random drugs test in accordance with his employer's drugs and alcohol policy. After providing a saliva test, the result returned positive for

cocaine. Mr Ball protested his innocence, denying that he had ever used drugs and saying that the test may have been contaminated. He said that he had not been required to wash his hands or wear gloves when handling the saliva sample and that during his shift he had been handling



banknotes which could have been contaminated with cocaine. Further, he argued that cocaine could have got into his system by him licking his fingers, which he often did due to carrying out blood prick tests for his diabetes condition.

In order to try and prove his innocence, Mr Ball provided his employer with the results of a hair follicle test, which he had paid for himself and which showed no trace of cocaine in his system.

He was invited to a disciplinary hearing and dismissed for gross misconduct. The results of the hair follicle test were rejected by his employer. The reason for the rejection of that test appears to have been that the hair follicle test had not been carried out by the employer's tester.

Mr Ball appealed internally against his dismissal twice, but in both instances the dismissal was upheld. The employer, as part of that appeal process, consulted with the tester of the saliva sample who stated that it was unlikely that a positive result could be produced in the way that the claimant alleged – that is, through contamination from banknotes and the absence of gloves

**When a 61-year-old man was recently dismissed by his employer following his failure of a drugs test, doubts were raised and the man paid for a separate test which showed no drugs in his system. Neither of the two appeal hearings took this into consideration and an employment tribunal found he had been wrongfully and unfairly dismissed, and awarded him almost £40,000 in compensation**

or handwashing. Neither of the appeal hearings took Mr Ball's hair follicle test into consideration.

The employment tribunal found that Mr Ball had been wrongfully and unfairly dismissed. It held that the employer's investigation and decision had not been within the band of reasonable responses. It found that the process was flawed on numerous points and stated that a reasonable employer would have re-tested Mr Ball given the doubts raised, the seriousness of the accusations and the potential impact it would have upon him.

In this case, Mr Ball was awarded almost £40,000 in compensation.

Golf clubs: this underlines the importance of carrying out as much

investigation as is reasonable in the circumstances, including consideration of any conflicting evidence that may be produced by an employee who is facing disciplinary proceedings. An employer should not simply ignore evidence put forward by an employee, since it could indicate a pre-determined outcome and lead to a finding of unfair dismissal.

*For any advice in relation to employment law matters or any other legal matters within a golf club, please contact Alistair Smith on [alistair@ngcaa.co.uk](mailto:alistair@ngcaa.co.uk) or 01886 812943*



### **The National Golf Clubs' Advisory Association**

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Web: [www.ngcaa.co.uk](http://www.ngcaa.co.uk)





## club profile

# Astbury Golf Club

**The Cheshire facility is a quintessentially English rural golf club that's looking forward to its centenary. And as it celebrates its history, thanks to a programme of investment in its course and clubhouse, its future is exciting as well, writes Andy Waple**



**T**he interesting history of Astbury Golf Club reveals a typical story about the development of the sport across rural England.

It all began in 1922 when three young men came across a bag of old golf clubs in the town clerk's office in the market town of Congleton, Cheshire.

How the clubs got there remains a mystery, but local folklore does provide a clue.

There are no records for confirmation but it is believed a golf club had been formed in the town and played across some local fields, before it was disbanded in the early part of World War One.

The trio clearly enjoyed thrashing balls around the same stretch of land, and they decided to form a new club, Astbury Golf Club, named after the nearby village. It didn't take long for the word to get around, and by inauguration, the club had attracted a membership of 64.

As golf fervour swept the country, Astbury grew and a clubhouse was built in 1924. In the same year the club purchased a horse drawn mower for use on the

fairways while all greens were fenced off with plain wire to keep off cattle.

The club continued to grow and began to become a hub of local community life.

A club professional was appointed and a number of competitions were introduced to the delight of a growing band of avid golfers.

By the end of the 1936 season, total membership for the club had reached 153, which included 57 ladies.

War again intervened, but this time it failed to force the club's demise, despite an order by the Cheshire War Agricultural Committee to let the course off for grazing. Towards the end of the war the committee rescinded its order and golf recommenced unhindered.

Since then the club has steadily developed as a typical English village club, enjoyed by members and visitors alike. It has grown to become a perfect community asset for Astbury, a small, pretty village, with a fine display of daffodils every spring and a well-kept village green. A number of timber-framed black and white buildings and cottages pepper the village – keeping that rural atmosphere.





# Ridgeway finance scheme to make transforming your locker rooms a reality

The Ridgeway finance scheme will allow you to utilise annual locker rentals to pay for your new lockers.

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It has a fine church, dating from the 12th to the 15th centuries, known for its detached tower and spire with carved oak roof and fine furnishings.

The Astbury golf course, running alongside the historic Macclesfield canal, is a testing parkland layout with eye-catching sweeping tree-lined fairways.

It has several challenging holes, particularly the 12th, a strong par five which requires a good carry over a ravine. Water comes into play on seven holes while the undulating terrain guarantees a variety of uphill and downhill lies.

The club hasn't rested on its laurels and over the years has invested heavily on the course. A number of improvements continue to be made, including the recent remodeling of greenside bunkers.

Beyond the course, Astbury prides itself on an inclusive, friendly atmosphere, and warmly welcomes new members, visitors and societies. A busy competition and social calendar ensures members get the most out of the club.

It has a modern, spacious clubhouse with a lively lounge bar with lovely views from the roof terrace over the first tee and 18th green.

In recent years the club has transformed its locker rooms, bringing them up to modern day standards and expectations.

The club employed leading changing room specialist Ridgeway Furniture to undertake the upgrades.

Ridgeway firstly remodeled the male visitors' rooms, and a year later returned to renovate and refit the ladies' facilities. The company returned again to complete the remodeling with a comprehensive upgrade of the male changing room and lastly, the visitors' and juniors' room.

Astbury Golf Club president Gary Adams said: "We are delighted at Astbury to be associated with Ridgeway Furniture. They have proved over all our dealings to be reliable, extremely professional, and have saved us a considerable amount of money re-furnishing our three main locker rooms over the last four years.

"We have no hesitation in recommending their services to other clubs, and will call on them in the future as a matter of course."

Since its inception Ridgeway has manufactured tens of thousands of lockers that have been installed in some of the most prestigious golf clubs in the world.

The company has seen turnover increase by more than 100 per cent over the past six years and has invested more than £500,000 in a new factory



increasing its capacity by over 50 per cent. The facility, at more than 18,000 square feet, means the company is now the UK's largest dedicated manufacturer of wooden lockers. TGB



## Ridgeway's latest golf installations following its expansion into a new state-of-the-art factory include:

- **Wentworth**
- **Cathkin Braes**
- **Cowglen**
- **Coxmoor**
- **La Moye (pictured below)**
- **The Richmond**

Another change for the company was the 2018 move into a new state-of-the-art factory, which coincided with over 30 years of manufacturing of wooden lockers and ancillary furniture for golf and leisure installations throughout Europe.

Ridgeway is now the largest UK dedicated manufacturer of wooden lockers and its latest investment in the new factory will dramatically improve its ability to meet the growing demand for Ridgeway's lockers and ancillary products.



### Testimonial

"Ridgeway are the locker room firm of choice in our industry. Wentworth wanted the very best to complement the high standard of the rest of the clubhouse. Ridgeway did not disappoint."

**Stephen Gibson**  
CEO, Wentworth Club

### Testimonial

"Ridgeway were very good to work with and the lockers add a touch of class to an exceptional new space."

**John Maguire**  
General Manager, The Richmond

**T**he past 18 months has been one of extraordinary growth for Ridgeway Furniture Manufacturing (FM), which has seen its lockers and furniture feature in some of the most prestigious golf club changing rooms in the UK.

It's also a period that has coincided with Chris Drury being with the company.

Chris was a fully qualified PGA professional at West Hertfordshire Golf Club for 10 years – but he had to leave the profession due to an ongoing eye condition.

He has flourished in his new career.

Chris' role is to maintain liaison with golf clubs and coordinate with the Ridgeway design team to ensure it fully meets the expectations of both the club management and their members.

Chris maintains regular contact with clubs with longer term projects, providing the latest information on new designs, options for financing their lockers and updates on golf projects recently completed.



**Ridgeway is the UK's largest dedicated manufacturer of wooden lockers**

## Ridgeway finance

The introduction of a variety of options to enable golf clubs to pay for their new lockers from future members' rentals has been warmly received by forward thinking clubs that wish to enhance their changing rooms to provide benefits to members and guests sooner rather than later. This can be done while still preserving capital reserves and / or making additional expenditure in improving the course to meet members' ongoing requirements.

To help clubs identify their members' future locker requirements Ridgeway will:

- Carry out a free survey to establish the space available
- Prepare initial designs to accommodate the perceived number and combination of lockers required
- Provide a detailed costing
- Provide an illustration of how the locker rentals will fully fund the lockers
- Provide sample lockers
- Draft suggested letter to members
- Provide a locker commitment form.

Once the exact numbers have been determined, the layout, costs and projections are amended to suit.

Invariably the new lockers can be

provided utilising cash flow from the locker rentals, which means that only members who have a rental locker are contributing towards their cost.

## Ridgeway philosophy

"Our corporate culture is based around being the best with a continual programme for developing new products. We have a highly motivated and experienced team which enables us to maintain high productivity and the best quality at all times.

"We are constantly looking for ways to improve our products and manufacturing systems. Over the years we have manufactured tens of thousands of lockers that have been installed in golf and health clubs across the UK and abroad."

## Key clients

"Our installations have earned us a reputation for quality, reliability service and style. We are proud to show potential clients locker rooms completed years ago that still look great. By carefully designing each project, using two and three-dimensional drawings, Ridgeway removes the uncertainty and anxiety involved in making an investment that will stand the test of time for well over a quarter of a century."

## The wooden locker market

The UK wooden locker market is relatively small, segmented broadly into four main groups:

- Sales and marketing companies that buy lockers from third parties
- Locker companies that outsource their wooden locker production
- Importers of lockers from overseas
- UK wooden locker manufacturers, of which Ridgeway is now the largest.

## Ridgeway golf installations include:

- Royal Birkdale
- Woburn
- Royal Porthcawl
- Royal Liverpool
- Gleneagles
- Wentworth
- Cathkin Braes Golf Club
- The Richmond Golf Club
- Ingrebourne Links
- La Moye Golf Club
- Mitcham Golf Club
- Forest Hill Golf Club
- Ashford Manor Golf Club
- Coxmoor Golf Club
- Northenden Golf Club

## Ridgeway manufacturing in the UK

"With Ridgeway controlling all aspects of the sales, design and production process, this enables us to react faster and be more flexible. This can be very important in meeting critical timescales, especially when new-build is involved as invariably these do not run to the original schedule." TGB

To enhance your changing rooms, email: [sales@ridgewayfm.com](mailto:sales@ridgewayfm.com) or tel: 01525 384298



in their own words

# Richard Dixon

chief executive of Wales Golf



'The Wales Golf club survey from last year shows 30 per cent of clubs have increased membership with an average gain of 45. Thirty-four per cent remained stable, while the remaining 36 per cent had an average loss of 19 members'



**etting** golf clubs to buck the trend and increase members is one of the biggest challenges facing governing bodies,

but in Wales we have proof of some answers.

The Wales Golf club survey from last year has just been completed and it shows roughly a third of clubs have gained members – and more than double the numbers at another third of clubs where membership is falling.

Of those who responded to the club survey, 30 per cent had increased membership with an average gain of 45. Thirty-four per cent remained stable,



while the remaining 36 per cent had an average loss of 19 members.

Those figures are encouraging as it shows there is a return on our efforts and the advice we give to our member clubs.

When you drill down in to the detail, there are clear reasons for those differences.

Clubs where membership is increasing do certain things differently from those where membership is falling.

Many more of them offer family membership, New2Golf, have a junior academy, have a full junior calendar, have engaged with a business support scheme, run community events, have promotional materials and hold new member induction.

It is no surprise that the vast majority of club members are over the age of 45; only four clubs had more members below the age of 45 than 45-plus.

The club website and social media are the most common ways of communicating with members, but there are still a fifth of clubs which do not use social media at all.

The number of clubs offering online tee-time booking has increased from 65 to 71 per cent, which is certainly progress in the right direction.

Around half the clubs are also seeing an increase in visitor fees, less than a fifth have seen a decrease. Half are now offering a nine-hole option for visitors.

It is usually the same clubs increasing membership and visitor numbers. Around nine out of ten clubs who increased membership also increased visitor numbers, while only a third of the other clubs saw increased visitors.

Another area of some interesting developments is equality on the course. In around two-thirds of the clubs in Wales, male and female members had access to the course at all times.

Disability golf is another area we have concentrated on at Wales Golf, with some encouraging signs. Eighty-three per cent of clubs are now aware of the modified rules for golfers with disabilities, compared to 53 per cent in our last clubs' survey.



From left to right: Welsh Amateur Golfer of the Year and PING Boys Order of Merit winner, Archie Davies, Wales Golf Tour Professional of the Year Becky Morgan and Welsh Girls champion Carys Worby. Left (top): Volunteer of the Year, David Oswyn Roberts, and, below, Development PGA Professional of the Year, John McDonald

There is much more information in our latest club survey, but it shows we are making progress – while there is also plenty of work still to do.

Finally we had a day of celebration with the Wales Golf Annual Awards, held in the 2010 Clubhouse at Ryder Cup host venue Celtic Manor.

**Becky Morgan** was there to receive the Wales Golf Tour Professional of the Year award for the first time, a few months after winning her first professional title at the Hero Women's Indian Open.

The Welsh Golf Club of the Year was **North Wales**, after a new manager and board of directors changed focus to become a community club and saw membership increase by 237 over the last two years, with the average age of members going down from 62 three years ago to 48 now.

**Cardigan** were the Junior Club of the Year after five years of hard work by the club volunteers built the junior section up to 50, including 14 girls.

Welsh Girls champion **Carys Worby**, from Newport Links in Pembrokeshire, was both the PING Ladies and PING Girls Order of Merit winner. **Archie Davies**, from Carlisle, was the Welsh Amateur Golfer of the Year and PING Boys Order of Merit winner, his highlight becoming the 2018 Irish Boys Open Amateur Champion.

The Men's Order of Merit was won by Southerndown's **Jake Hapgood**, the Wales international showing impressive consistency throughout the season.

**Many of the clubs with growing memberships offer family membership, have a full junior calendar, have engaged with a business support scheme, run community events, hold new member induction, use social media and offer online tee-time booking**

The Development PGA Professional of the Year was **John McDonald** of Llantrisant and Pontyclun GC, a Wales Golf academy coach who has led the club into becoming an HSBC Golf Roots centre and being one of the

supporting PGA professionals in the initial Golf Sixes Pilot in Wales.

The Volunteer of the Year was **David Oswyn Roberts** of Ruthin Pwllglas, who has been involved in volunteering at the club for more than 50 years and has been chairman for the last 10.

It was a very strong year – and of course all those club achievements made particularly interesting reading in the context of the club survey. TGB

For more information, visit [www.walesgolf.org](http://www.walesgolf.org)



the PGA professional

# Hailing Hanson

**Simon Hanson is the head PGA professional at Kemnay Golf Club in Aberdeenshire. The TGI's 'new partner of the year' talks to *The Golf Business* about the technology he uses to boost his pro shop and how the club encourages more beginners into the game**



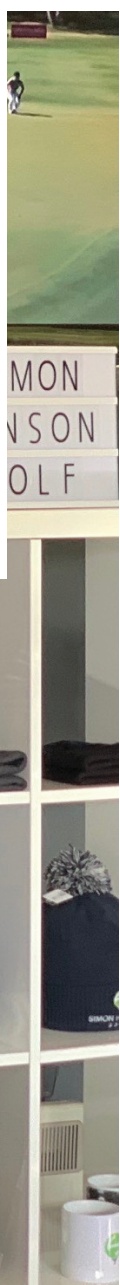
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hat daily challenges do you face in running a pro shop and teaching?

The daily challenges in the pro shop vary day-to-day. Primarily the challenges are ensuring the members and visitors to Kemnay Golf Club receive the best possible experience when

they visit the pro shop – maintaining a well presented and stocked shop with a friendly face to greet them.

In teaching, every golfer is different. For me, identifying the issues in the swing that is specific to the individual golfer is paramount.







**There is a constant flow of new golf products – how do you manage your stock to serve the needs of your members and visitors?**

As my business is only in its second year, I'm still in the process of building up the business and re-investing back into it while keeping a very close eye on cash flow.

To ensure I offer the right number of products and services to our customers, I constantly analyse my stock control to make sure I'm not overstocked and keep stock turns as high as possible.

I also have a sales forecast and buying plan which allows me to manage my stock expenditure based on my forecast sales.

**How do you manage your day?**

I use an online diary which I can access anywhere through an app on my phone.

I'm also a big fan of making to-do lists, which I prioritise each morning. During the day there are always things that crop up that become a priority, to manage the business effectively I will make sure I set out time each week for different tasks, whether that be accountancy, marketing, shop analysis and so on.

**What are you doing to support junior golf and introduce kids to the sport?**

Since starting at Kemnay last year I have been keen to promote junior golf at the club and the local area. Throughout last year I offered free junior lessons on specific dates where current juniors and potential new ones could come and have a lesson.

The club has a large number of juniors in ClubGolf (Scottish Golf's national junior programme) and I will be taking over the coaching of the older transitional group of juniors to help get them make the move to playing the full course and gain handicaps.

I have also been working with the local Active Schools' co-ordinator to go into the local schools and offer an introduction to golfer for the school kids.

**The club offers a specific membership for our six-hole course, which allows beginners and families to learn to play the game in a relaxed environment**

## the PGA professional

**Are you trying to attract more women to golf?**

Yes. While the club has a relatively strong ladies' membership, it has been actively promoting 'Get into golf' schemes to encourage ladies to play the game. For 2019 I will be offering taster sessions to ladies and structured coaching sessions for the lady members, making it more of a social event included coaching at the same time.

**Do you have any programmes in place such as academy membership to make it easier to introduce beginners to the game?**

We have an excellent practice facility at the golf club with our Beechbank six-hole golf course and practice area, which is perfect for beginners to learn to play the game rather than just hitting balls at a driving range.

The club offers a specific membership for Beechbank, which allows beginners and families to learn to play the game in a relaxed environment until they build confidence to move on to the 18-hole championship course.

**A lot of PGA pros are having to be a step ahead of their competitors in their offerings and technology – what additional added value services do you provide?**

Technology is becoming a vital part of the services you offer to your customers. Whether that be for coaching and





tgi

custom fitting, or for marketing and advertising in store.

For coaching and practice I have an indoor golf studio with launch monitor. This can be used for a coaching and custom fitting. We also have golf simulator software so golfers can rent the facility and play a round of golf at over 100,000 different courses.

I also invested in technology for putter fittings and lessons. Again, this enhances the services and experience for our customers.

**When did you join the TGI Golf Partnership and what was it about it that attracted you?**

When I set up the business in February 2018 I signed up straight away to become a TGI partner.

Having working previously at the Paul Lawrie Golf Centre, which is an associate partner of TGI, I was able to experience first hand the services and support the group offers. Being able to tap into the resources that TGI offer as well as having a retail consultant to help and offer advice when needed.







**Has TGI Golf been of benefit to you as a PGA professional?**

TGI has been a huge benefit in helping me settle into the role of club professional at Kemnay. Through their support and advice, the services they offer. It allowed me to hit the ground running.

**What year did you turn professional and what have been your career highlights, both playing and employment?**

I turned professional back in 2003 and was a relative latecomer as I was 25 at the time. I had already completed a university degree in business while previously working in the finance industry. However, I decided to get out of the 'Rat Race' and took the opportunity to work as a trainee PGA professional at Elgin Golf Club.

My playing career highlights are not too exciting, as an amateur I played competitively at local level, winning both the junior and adult club championship at my home club, and playing for the North East of Scotland team on several occasions.

When turning professional I didn't see a career in playing, instead I focused on developing a career in a sport that I have a passion for. During my PGA training I was successful in becoming Trainee of the Year for Scotland in both my first and second years of training, narrowly missing out on winning it for all three years.

I was recently named at TGI Golf's New Partner of the Year at the annual awards held at Trump Turnberry, which was an amazing experience. TGB

**Simon (left), receiving the award from Chris Todd, TGI Golf Group Services Coordinator**



# Toro

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A £1.2 million investment in the 18-hole course at one of the world's oldest golf clubs, Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society in Edinburgh, has concluded with the arrival of a brand new Toro fleet of machinery to safeguard the investment.

As course manager Neil Hogg says, you don't create something of this quality if you don't have the machinery to keep it at its best: "This is our first package deal and the timing coincides with the conclusion of the extensive revamp of the course. The course has been designed around a very modern spec and reflects the way golf is played in the 21st Century. We knew we needed a package deal to take care of the course and deliver the results it deserves."

There are now eight new holes and more than 80 bunkers which have been redesigned and repositioned to reflect the distances club golfers are now striking the ball, plus the course has been restored to a par 71 to create longer play.

"The shed was previously a mixed bag of machines. Some were getting on for 30 years old and the machinery that made up the fleet as a whole hadn't really been considered. With Dougie, our CEO's guidance, plus that of Reesink's Stuart Tait and David Raitt, we looked at how we could streamline things and ensure the best for the future," he said.

Included in the deal are two Reelmaster 3575-D fairway mowers, two

Reelmaster 3100-D mowers with Sidewinders, five Greensmaster 1000 pedestrian mowers, two Greensmaster 3250-D ride-on greens mowers, a Workman MDX utility vehicle and a TYM 503 heavy-duty tractor.

"The new fleet is delivering on our expectations. All the staff

love using the machines, the fairway mowers are so nimble and light, and the pedestrian mowers in particular are a big hit. Plus, maintenance and servicing are a lot easier."



# Toro

Leading the way with the latest technology in turfcare, Toro's myTurf Pro fleet management software program is proving to be a popular addition at UK golf clubs across the country.

Word is spreading about the software which automatically logs information about all machines in operation at the club meaning greenkeepers can track data for their Toro or non-Toro equipment, order parts, schedule services, and gain access to information such as parts and service manuals.

Neil McLoughlin, course manager at Deeside Golf Club, says that having myTurf Pro has made a "real difference" at the club: "We have a full fleet of Toro machines at Deeside. Being able to log everything from scheduled maintenance to our inventory, all in the same place, is incredibly useful. Plus with service and parts manuals accessible as well, all the information that I might need is just a click away."

Designed to make a difficult job easier, having everything at your fingertips has shown to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of greenkeeping fleet management. Something Andrew Airlie, mechanic at The Royal Automobile Club, wholeheartedly agrees with.

"It gives you easy access to everything you need, which has made a huge difference," he says. "For example, we used to spend endless amounts of time logging the hours on machines manually, but with myTurf Pro, it submits the data in real-time via wireless internet connection."

As well as providing information and logging data automatically, myTurf Pro also sends notifications when a machine needs servicing, which has been a "huge help", says Neil Corley, head mechanic at The Grove Golf Club.

With its many features created to help with the maintenance of greenkeeping machinery, regardless of brand, the myTurf Pro software is becoming a fast favourite for UK greenkeepers.



# Are you a micro manager?

A micro manager – a boss who gives excessive supervision to employees – can be a problem for any business. Here, golf clubs' staff trainer Frank Newberry explains how they come about



micro managers closely supervise their staff whether these conditions exist or not. The micro managers people complain to me about seem to have little or no confidence in employees' ability to do the work to a decent standard.

Micro managers often excuse all the checking and inspecting they do by claiming to be 'a perfectionist'. Because of this they can also find delegating tasks to people very difficult.

The opposite of this type of individual would be a 'macro manager'. Macro managers, when at work, are more likely to define the desired outcomes of a task and then leave staff alone to perform the task. A macro manager assumes staff are competent and can complete a task without being continually reminded of the process and the standards expected.

## Why do some people become micro managers?

Many micro managers were promoted from the lower levels after they had proved their ability at the lower level – perhaps where the real work is done. After a while they may have been promoted because of their accumulated experience and expertise. Their employers at some point may have even used promotion

**A micro manager** is a person who closely supervises all employees to ensure that work is carried out to the

highest standard. Not a bad thing at all if:

- The slightest error or omission might be spotted immediately by paying customers or other key stakeholders;

- The stakes are high for the employer ('make or break' for the organisation);
- The staff are new or unqualified, seasonal and / or inexperienced and the boss is the only one with the necessary expertise and knowledge.

The above conditions are often determined by an organisation's situation. However, many



## management



An irony of having a micro manager is that better employees tend to leave – replaced by less talented staff members who actually need to be micro-managed

to stop them leaving and going to their competition.

Sadly, in this sector, many people get the manager job but not the manager training. In my experience, many end up not being a true manager but an expert worker who can solve work-related problems. Unfortunately, the supervisory management skills like planning and organising the work, motivating people and controlling results are often not developed.

Many promotees are also not trained to build their staff's confidence so that one day they will be able to take on greater responsibility. So, promotees micro manage to compensate.

This inevitably causes some managers to judge their staff on their current skills – often unfavourably because the manager's own skills are superior. They have not yet accepted, for whatever reason, that their staff's skill development is their professional responsibility. So again, they micro manage to compensate.

Many promotees even find it hard to give up the 'work tasks' that they are good at themselves so (you've guessed it) they micro manage to compensate.

### The biggest problem caused by micro managers

There are several unnecessary problems caused by micro managers, but I want to mention just the biggest one.

I believe that the greatest problem micro managers cause their employers is the loss to the organisation of good workers, or people with real potential. These good

**Some managers have not yet accepted that their staff's skill development is their professional responsibility. So they micro manage to compensate**

people leave the organisation because they feel they cannot progress under a micro manager. These 'better' employees usually leave to get a job with more prospects, or one with greater potential for growth and professional development.

The micro manager ultimately causes the employer to be left with the less talented (who cannot get work elsewhere) and who – guess what – need to be micro-managed.

In my view, there can be no greater loss to an organisation than the loss of its good workers. TGB

*This is the first of a two-part series and in the next article Frank will suggest some ways we can all manage the micro manager.*

*Frank Newberry has been training people in the UK golf sector since 1989 and clients include St Andrews Links Trust, Gullane Golf Club, Royal Cinque Ports and The Wisley.*

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environmental legislation



# 2 years interest free from Waste2Water



**E**nvironmental stewardship is now a legal requirement enforced by legislation. Everyone is probably now aware it is a criminal offence to allow certain substances including mineral oils, detergents and chemicals to enter surface drains, watercourses or soakaways, causing groundwater pollution. Large fines of up to £50,000 and even imprisonment can now be levied in the event of a serious pollution incident.

## EU Water Framework Directive

A raft of legislation has been recently introduced to reinforce this message, including the EU Water Framework Directive which was fully implemented last year. So, if you have not already installed a dedicated wash area to avoid the risk of pollution now is the time to act to ensure your course is environmentally compliant.

## Two-year interest-free finance

Hundreds of golf courses have installed our system but what if you are keen to make sure you are compliant but are unsure about financing the investment? With investment in a recycling wash system now an urgent

priority to ensure environmental compliance, we are delighted to offer our in-house two year interest-free finance package. We fund the scheme ourselves so it couldn't be simpler!

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- Spreads the investment cost over up to three accounting years!

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Installing a Waste2Water Recycling Wash-Off System provides a superb equipment wash facility and ensures compliance with the environmental legislation. Equipment wash-off, refueling, degreasing, chemical mixing and any other potentially polluting activities can all be undertaken on the pad, removing any risk of groundwater pollution from routine activities.

Better still, the recycling wash system continuously re-uses the same water, reducing wash water usage by more than 90 per cent!

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Inclusion in the Water Technology List (WTL scheme) provides a very handy cash flow boost with a 100 per cent first year Enhanced Capital Allowance (ECA). This gives full 100 per cent tax relief against taxable profits in year one – instead of the standard reclaim period of eight years! It sounds a bit complicated but rest assured your accountant will be delighted!

## Installing a Waste2Water Recycling Wash System

Installing a Waste2Water system could not be easier, often easily retro-fitting into an existing area. The recycling system ensures environmental compliance, reduces water usage by a massive 90 per cent and tidies up one of the worst aspects of golf course maintenance.

Our above-ground system is very easy to maintain and you can see what's going on, ensuring there are no undetected underground leaks. The above-ground dirt settlement tank allows easy removal of the dirt from the recycling system at no cost! You don't need expensive specialist waste contractors to empty the tanks, as with underground systems! TGB

**Tim Earley is the managing director of ESD Waste2Water**

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The Goodwood Estate in West Sussex has a cricket pitch, an airfield and a horse racing track, among other activities, in addition to the two 18-hole golf courses that make up the Golf at Goodwood brand. Phil Helms MG, Goodwood's general manager of Sports Turf, Grounds & Gardens, talks about overcoming these unique challenges

*Phil Helms MG*





# The world of Goodwood

**T**he 12,000 acre Goodwood Estate has two historic 18-hole courses at its heart, providing the opportunity to combine a round of golf with one of the many other activities on offer, including the world-famous Festival of Speed, Goodwood Revival and Glorious Goodwood. The estate has been in the Duke of Richmond's family for more than three centuries and in recent years has received credit for its flexible membership options to golfers, which have proven to be very popular.

Phil Helmn MG, general manager of Sports Turf, Grounds & Gardens – Goodwood Estate, talks about his career and the work that goes into maintaining this unique and varied venue.

"Since leaving college in 1987, where I gained my diploma in sports turf science with honours, I have lived and breathed golf and greenkeeping all my life," he said. "I have worked hard to rise up

through the greenkeeping ranks, starting my career as a trainee at Morecambe Golf Club in Lancashire at the tender age of 18, and became a Master Greenkeeper (one of 74 worldwide) in 2001.

"My father was the local golf pro at Morecambe GC and that greatly influenced my early career. I have always worked in the propriety-owned golf course world and have gained 30 years of valuable experience working with tight budgets and the need to get the best out of all resources available. I have managed large teams on a wide range of soil types both in the UK and Europe, and have used these experiences to fine-tune my mentoring and common sense management style. When my busy work schedule allows, I continue to support local colleges by lecturing in sports turf, giving me the opportunity to give back to the industry. I joined Goodwood in January 2013."

Helmn oversees an overall full-time team of 30, with five working on the Park Course and eight on the Downs. There are also eight in the gardens team and a further eight working on the grounds and



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## the golf course

cricket pitches. During the growing season these teams are supplemented with a further 15 casual staff in order to deliver the attention to detail required from such a prestigious site.

What aeration and topdressing programmes do the team run?

“Aeration is typically a mixture of slit tining, hollow coring (of problem greens), verti-draining and twice a year we use the Air2G2 aerator,” he explains.

“Throughout the year we also lightly sorrel spike our surfaces which helps us prior to liquid feeds.

“We aim to apply around 100 tonnes of sand topdressing to our greens’ surfaces throughout the growing season on each course and we find this hugely beneficial to good strong growth, aiding faster ball speeds and creating smoother surfaces.

“We use seed from across DLF’s Masterline and Johnsons ranges throughout the site, with the majority of our surfaces being predominantly ryegrass. In recent years we have used various mixtures on the two courses but have now unified this to use the same mixtures on both. On the greens we’re on a bent grass overseeding programme with the Johnsons J All Bent mixture. The 50/50 Arrowtown and Manor browntop mixture delivers the fast, sustainable greens we’re looking for. We’re then using the hardwearing J Rye Fairway mixture, and on the tees we have recently switched, with success, to the J 4Turf Tetraploid mix.”

The club has also put in place a bunker renovation programme.

“The Downs’ bunkers were redesigned four years ago and re-built. Our five-year plan is to re-line the bases, re-edge all 66 bunkers and, at the same time, take the opportunity to change the sand type,” he details.

“The sand change follows trials of various sands and we will change to a slightly coarser sand to try and reduce drying out in the summer months.

“The Downs, being located on the top of the chalk-based South Downs hills, gives us particular problems when the weather becomes too hot and dry.

“The Park course’s 60 bunkers will also be renovated in



*Phil, alongside some of his grounds team with the Golf Environment Organisation certification, for Golf at Goodwood's commitment to sustainability across both golf courses, which was awarded last year*

**We have a full membership of 2,000  
so the golf course is always busy.  
We have filmed videos of our work,  
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course and carry out the necessary work  
needed to keep standards high**



the same timescale and the emphasis here is to keep the same sand type (as it's on a more sheltered part of the estate) but take the opportunity to reduce the overall size, making them more maintenance-friendly."

Golf At Goodwood's greenkeeping team has also realised its ambition of gaining the coveted GEO (Golf Environment Organisation) certification, for its commitment to sustainability across both courses.

"Goodwood has many environmentally conscious initiatives across the estate," states Helmn. "We have vast conservation areas, sustainable woodland management practices and as such it felt right that the two golf courses did their bit for the planet. We were proud to take part in the GEO award scheme and delighted that we were successful. We haven't stopped there – it's given us the drive to continue to find even more ways to become planet friendly. It's very exciting to see the team's efforts towards this goal."

Following last year's hot summer and increasing costs, water management is also a focus for Helmn: "Last year was a particularly challenging year for us across the estate generally. Our current irrigation system is very old and only just coped with the business demands. It has highlighted for us the need to take a comprehensive look at our current system and, to that end, we have formed a group to explore what the future needs to look like for the estate. Recently I have become heavily involved in an estate-wide water usage exercise and, as such, irrigation, abstraction, storage and conservation are all hot topics for us. Future-proofing water management on the estate for the next century is top of our list."



Goodwood's famous 'Golf Woody' buggies



Golf at Goodwood also places emphasis on training and education, as Helmn explains.

"We have a comprehensive training budget and endeavour to keep training at the forefront of our work ethic. We have a significant in-house training programme run by our own human resources team.

"These courses either last for a couple of hours or one to two days depending on the content. These courses include topics such as understanding stress, time management, difficult conversations, health in the workplace and how to communicate effectively, to name just a handful.

"The team attended over 75 training sessions last year, as well as some external, more traditional qualifications associated with the industry. Learning and developing ourselves has been terrific to help us achieve a far better work culture within in our team."

Finally, Helmn reveals how the membership affects the ability of the team to keep the playing surfaces and presentation of the courses to such a high standard.

"Getting the right balance between improvement work and presentation work is always a challenge," he says. "We have a full membership of 2,000 at Goodwood (with a waiting list) and so the golf course is always busy. I think we have been able to achieve a relatively happy balance, and innovative communication has definitely helped us educate our membership and keeps the grumbles to a minimum. We have filmed videos of our work, produced blogs and newsletters, held members' barbecues with seminars and hosted course walks – all have done a great job in helping us to get out on the course and carry out the necessary work needed to keep standards high." TGB







**F**ormer electrician Chris Smith is keen to crank up the difficulty voltage at Cranleigh Golf & Country Club in his role as the club's new course manager.

The 47-year-old flicked the career switch a decade ago to pursue his passion in greenkeeping and subsequent roles at West Middlesex, Merristwood, Hartley Wintney, Pyrford and Southwood led to his December 2018 appointment at the par-68 Surrey venue.

Although Cranleigh is a relatively short course by today's standards at under 6,000 yards, it places serious demands on accuracy and strategy. And Smith is determined to ensure all of those defences are available as much as possible with special attention earmarked for approximately 50 bunkers dotted around the course.

For Smith, it means fixing the plugs is all about eradicating buried lies in sand traps, rather than making sure the wires are in the correct sockets.

Smith explained: "I've played Cranleigh a few times and it is generally in great condition – they have done a fantastic job here in recent years. The

greens are always in superb condition.

"But the bunkers are the main thing to address. They have had a few issues with puddles in bunkers when it gets a bit wet so they were marked as ground under repair and out of action.

"Golf isn't supposed to be easy – if you hit it in a bunker, you should then have to play it out. That's part of the game and this is a course which definitely needs its bunkers.

"So we will be tackling that. It's not a huge job to make sure all of our bunkers are in play as much as possible in all weathers. I'm not sure whether that will make me popular or not but we want the course to be played as it is supposed to be played as much as possible."

Smith, who is originally from Derbyshire and is a five-handicapper, is heading a team of five greenkeeping staff but knows his broad range of skills from his previous

# Taking charge

**Just 10 years ago Chris Smith was working as an electrician. Today he's the course manager of Cranleigh Golf & Country Club in Surrey. He talks about the work he's set to do in his new role – and how the club occasionally benefits from his former career**



career will come in handy at a club which has so many other leisure activities available.

He said: "I was an electrician before but I love the game and I want to see people enjoying the course. I love what I do now.

"But that doesn't stop people from asking me to fix the odd

electrical issue. I've fixed the terrace lights already and I'm sure there will be a few jobs cropping up from time to time!

"My priority is the course but I'm happy to help out where I can. There is a friendly feel all around the club. Everyone does their bit so it's great to be part of that." TGB



Chris Smith

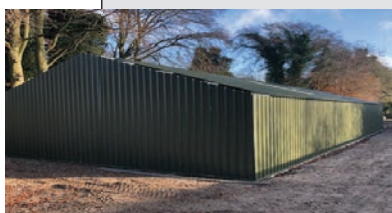


### Tidworth Garrison

Tidworth Garrison Golf Club in Wiltshire has taken on two major greenkeeping projects this year. One is the development of a new greens' compound facility for the storage of machinery, the second is renovation of the bunkers.



"The shed is to comply with health and safety regulations and for the welfare and benefit of our staff," explained Geoff Johnson MBE, the club's manager.



"The shed provides 200 metres squared of covering to house our most expensive machinery and provides a comfortable working area for the staff in inclement weather. The course manager, Damion Woods, is delighted with the project as it shows that the club are investing not only in

the course but in their staff.

"We have also been doing extensive work over the winter in renovating bunkers. This project was difficult to get started due to the nature of the materials that we wanted to use. The members were able to view a trial bunker, from the construction to the laying of turf to the finished article. The choice of sand was another issue, however, after trying various samples the members selected RH37 sand which is best suited to the land here. The sand is a mix of coarse, medium and fine sands which is heavy enough to stay in place yet light enough not to compact down and aids raking.

"The construction of the bunkers is done by lining the base with astro turf lining and building the walls from narrow cut astro turf strips. Once complete it gives the riveted look while reducing maintenance, stopping ingress of stones and chalk, providing a consistent playing surface from bunker to bunker.

"We completed six bunkers this winter with a further three to start. We expect to complete the programme of bunker refurbishment over the next five years using this method to further help improve the quality of the course for both members and visitors."



### Trump Turnberry

Trump Turnberry has unveiled new enhancements to its Ailsa course.

Eric Trump recently visited the resort to view the new changes and said: "The most recent enhancements to the Ailsa, and the wider golf offering at the resort, are a testament to the passion and commitment all of us feel towards fostering Turnberry's great golf heritage. We aim to ensure it remains a true icon of the sport, recognised and admired all over the world."

Ricky Hall, director of golf, added: "It's crucial that we continue to evolve. That is why we have put so much care and attention into the recent investment and improvements.

"Our director of courses and estates, Allan Patterson, suggested that there was an opportunity to raise the ninth green slightly and also extend the 11th green site. In the case of the 11th, rough vegetation was removed to expose natural sand areas and rocky outcrops, and a new greenside bunker was added.

"The burn at the 16th hole has always been one of the most memorable features of the course. However, it has also always been problematic, being slow running, particularly in dry spells, choked with silt and requiring constant clearing. The new banking is handsome, the water runs fast over a concrete base and, with the introduction of three stone weirs, there is even the pleasant sound generated by the falling water. Improvements to the bridge itself complete the picture.

"Areas of impenetrable rough have been replaced with either mown edges to the fairways or scraped to expose areas of sand-waste, which is visually pleasing and makes the ball easier to find and play, whilst retaining an element of penalty."



## Toro

reesinkturfcare.co.uk

It's been a time of change for Woking Golf Club in Surrey culminating in the recent signing of a machinery agreement plan with Toro and Reesink Turfcare.

It all started a couple of years ago and has seen the appointment of Andy Ewence as course manager and major works to restore the course to its fast running heathland roots. The result is a club that has risen 22 places in the *Golf World Top 100 Golf Courses in Britain and Ireland* ranking in 2018, now ranked 17th in England, and the delivery of a new Toro fleet is the icing on the cake says Andy.

For 125 years golfers have been playing at Woking Golf Club, Surrey's oldest heathland golf course, and it was this milestone moment that sparked a period of change.

Andy says: "I knew from experience that Toro was well ahead of the competition, but it's like chalk and cheese when you compare Toro to what we had here before. The quality of machinery and the service is just unbeatable. However, we made sure to explore all the options when the last lease ended. We trialed machines from several different brands, but it proved quickly that Toro was the right way to go."

Now with a comprehensive Toro fleet which includes a Greensmaster TriFlex 3400, Groundsmaster 4000-D, ProCore 1298 and a Workman HDX-D to name a few, Andy is thrilled with the new machines.



"We have undulating greens, so having pedestrian mowers that provide precision and a high quality of cut is really important," says Andy. "In particular, the Toro Greensmaster eFlex 2120 is great. The Lithium-ion battery technology reduces noise so we can get out and start work earlier, plus it saves fuel."

And, as mentioned, it's not only the machines that have impressed Andy, but the advice and service from Reesink, too. "The whole process with Reesink has been great," he says. "They didn't try to sell us anything the club didn't need – they listened to what we wanted and came back with the best possible solution. They've also come in and given a day long training course to the team on how to use the machines. Nothing has been too much trouble. I'm sure the playing surface is only going to improve massively with Toro now at the club. "It's going to bring the already high standard of the course up a notch, which we're all really excited to see."

## EAGLE

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Spring is now officially here – the clocks have gone forward so the evenings are much lighter and we've even had The Masters. Equally, Easter has come and gone and, historically, Eagle has seen a spike in



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