

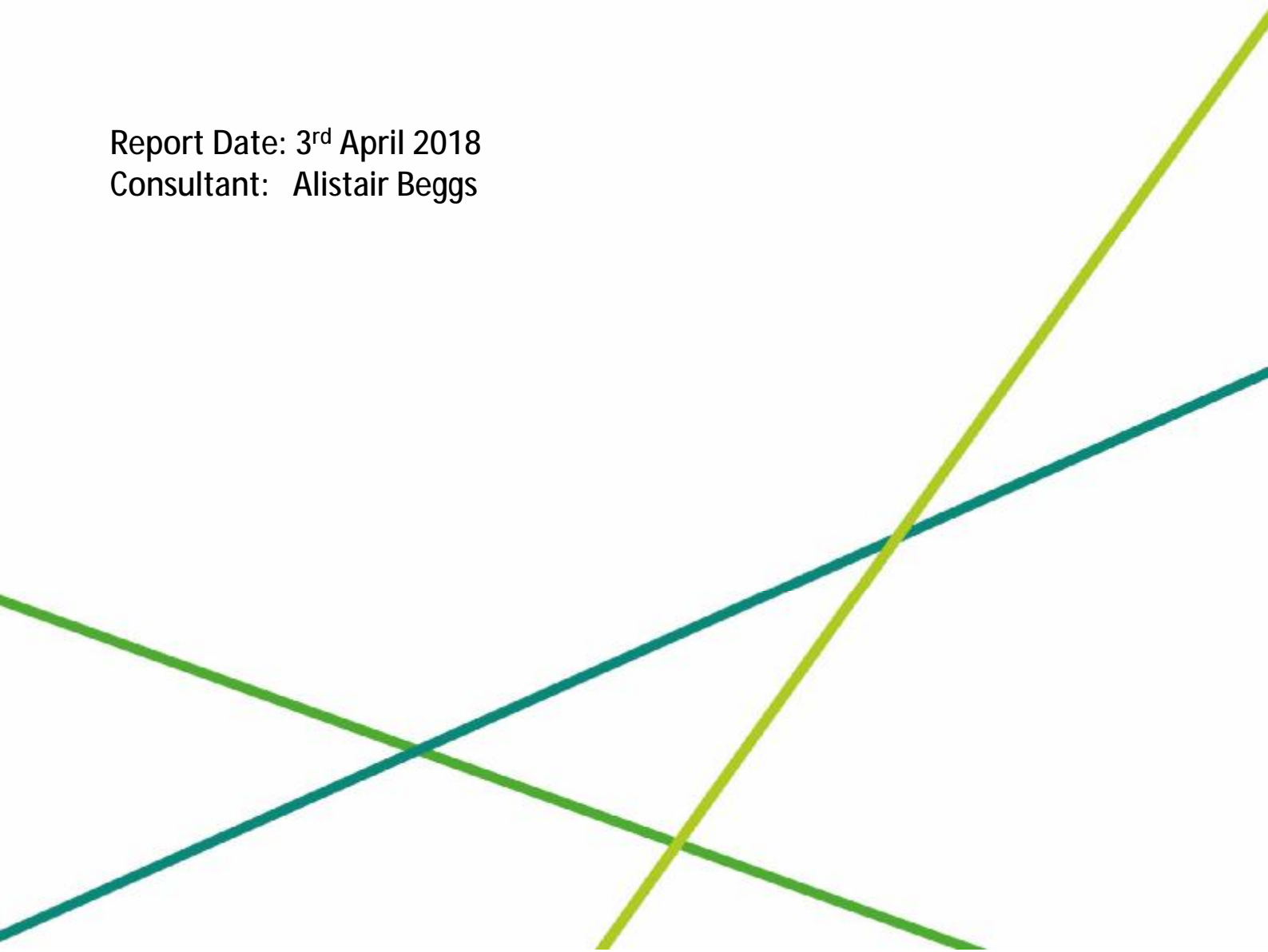


Making great sport happen

WIRRAL GOLF CLUB

Advisory Report on the Golf Course

Report Date: 3rd April 2018
Consultant: Alistair Beggs



Date of Visit: Wednesday 28th March 2018

Visit Objective: To review prevailing conditions and to offer advice on future management.

Present: Mr Jim Williams – Captain
Ms Liz Monroe – Ladies Committee
Mr Paul Asher – Chairman of Green
Mr Bill Benbow – Green Committee
Mr Geoff Marley – Green Committee
Mr John Hughes – Green Committee
Mr Alec Wright – Head Greenkeeper
Mr Alistair Beggs – Head of Agronomy, STRI Ltd

Weather: Cool and showery. Temperature 7°C

Headlines

- The winter has been cold and wet and with no spring temperatures to speak of, many courses in the NW of England are perhaps three weeks behind with maintenance schedules.
- Despite the poor weather much progress has been made over the last six months with vegetation management and drainage. Real differences are being made to the golfing experience as a result.
- Greens have come out of winter in good order. Disease has been well controlled, aeration and sand targets have been met, and protection has been delivered where required.
- The need to extend and improve surround and approaches was emphasised.
- Targeted verti-draining of wet areas needs to be intensified.
- Tree and vegetation clearance must continue to provide a more sustainable heathland golf experience for future generations to enjoy.

Key Actions

- Allow the recently applied fertiliser to promote more consistent growth before beginning any refinement work. Focus on brushing, with verticutting introduced only when swards have strengthened.
- Narrow gauge 8mm solid tining should commence now on a strict monthly cycle.
- Support aeration with liberal sand dressing with the Chelford 45 material. The target for the year is 120 tonnes per hectare. More sand shall be applied to known wetter sections of turf e.g. rear of 2nd, middle and rear of 4th (which has been successfully sumped), 8th, rear of 17th etc.
- Hand mow with the Paladins at every opportunity throughout the season at no lower than 4mm.
- All greens should be cored, sanded and seeded with bent cultivars in August. Good bent gains have been made in the last couple of years.
- Tees and surrounds should be sprayed with iron to discourage moss and worm activity.
- Surrounds should be extended and cut with the Jacobsen triple with a view to boxing clippings. Keep the fairway mower further away from greens from now on.
- Intensive and repeated verti-drain work must commence to known wetter sections of the course as soils dry in the coming weeks. Aim for two or three passes to areas such as 1 approach, 2 carry, 5 and 15 carry, top of 13 fairway etc. Return to this activity in early autumn and supplement this with sand dressing if budgets allow.
- Great strides have been made with vegetation management e.g. left of 3rd, between the 5th and 15th, left of 7th, between the 6th and 12th and around the 17th. Slowly but surely space is being created, airflow and sunlight penetration are being increased, and the course is becoming more playable and fairer for all. Most importantly however, a more sustainable golfing facility is being promoted, one that will be naturally healthier and less reliant on chemicals, because the environment for turf management is being optimised. This work must continue. There is still much to achieve.

Photo Observations and Comments



Figure 1: Greens have emerged from a cold winter in good order. Disease impacts have been well controlled. Scarring was limited to sections of 2, 8, and 15.



Figure 2: The sward blend is strong with finer bents showing more obviously in better greens e.g. 18. The 15th is a real improver. The weakest include 2, 4, 8 and 17. Here meadow grass remains the prevalent species.



Figure 3: Profile surfaces need more amelioration with sand. The agreed target will deliver this and we should expect to see this visually during future visits.



Figure 4: Root growth is strong and reflects the attention to aeration last autumn and more recently with the verti-drain. Further 8mm tining is vital now.



Figure 5: Worm activity on approaches and surrounds is a weakness. More liberal use of iron sulphate and the boxing of clippings are suggested as solutions. The aim is to adjust cutting cycles so surrounds and approaches are expanded, cut with the Jacobsen and clippings collected. This will allow the fairway mower to be kept further away from greens.



Figure 6: Tees are looking a little tired. They need iron sulphate, the planned slow release fertiliser treatment, and some aeration and dressing. When mowing cycles commence with growth they should look much improved.

Photo Observations and Comments (continued)



Figure 7: There are pockets of wet ground around the course which require more aggressive aeration to improve them. This is the 2nd carry. Here, and at the 1st approach, 13th fairway, 18th fairway etc., more regular verti-drain work should be considered as soils dry this spring.



Figure 8: The progress made with tree and vegetation thinning over the winter has been quite dramatic. This is the 3rd green. The 4th tee is now visible beyond it. The result is perfect – more air, more light and the opportunity to extend the green complex.



Figure 9: Clearance between the 6th and 12th has allowed the ditch to be cleared and opened. This needs further work to perfect surface levels but the opportunity to improve this area of the course is well underway.



Figure 10: Gorse and scrub removal to the right of the 5th is allowing the re-introduction of heathland species in the correct balance – heather, gorse and ultimately some acid grassland as well.



Figure 11: The area around the 17th green has been opened to the left making for a much more playable Par 3. Increased airflow will help dry the surface in future years. Further gorse removal is suggested front right to improve visibility of the green from the tee.



Figure 12: We must not forget bunkers. They are not a priority at present but there are many examples in need of improvement. Poor bunkers detract from a hole. Good bunkers can greatly enhance a hole.

Recommendations and Comments

Greens

- The invigorator product has been applied and should take effect shortly. My only comment would be to split the 70 gram application into two 35 gram applications next spring. This should give a more balanced growth response when it comes. For this year your approach is perfect given the lateness of spring.
- Support the above programme with the usual organic seaweed applications (Surf and Turf), SSD in May and light liquid-based feeds through the summer as necessary. Aim to deliver around 60-70 Kg/Ha N this year.
- No changes are recommended to the wetting agent programme. Apply Revolution monthly from now on and do not let greens dry down, particularly through the spring. Hand irrigate if it turns dry in April.
- Begin 8-10mm solid tining with the Procore with immediate effect. Aim for penetration to around 125-150mm. Do it monthly without fail.
- The sand target for 2018 was agreed at 120 tonnes per hectare. Continue to use the Chelford 45 product to achieve this. Extra sand should be applied to known wetter sections of turf including the rear of the 2nd, the sumped section of the 4th, centre of the 8th and the rear of the 17th.
- We support the sumping work completed at the 4th. However, do not expect miracles! The work is dependent on connecting with permeable strata to depth and will probably take 6-12 months to start draining optimally. Next winter will be the "acid test" for this.
- The greens are advanced for the time of year given that weather patterns have been so cold. This is because bent populations are on the increase (seeding and vegetation removal work) and disease activity has been controlled and well managed. Nevertheless, we are still a few weeks away from verticutting refinement, but it should be introduced once growth is continuous and mowing is occurring daily. Between now and then focus more on brushing to gently train the lateral growth.
- Mow with the Paladins at every opportunity. If possible, only use the triples at weekends. This will strengthen edges, improve presentation and help protect the bent gains we are seeing. Keep heights at 4mm or above.
- Hollow core all the greens in the August window with 12mm tines. Back this up with liberal sanding and the application of high quality bent seed. Cultivars to select from include Arrowtown, Manor and the new Barenbrug cultivar called Charles.
- Watch for leatherjacket activity in September/October. If it is widespread focus autumn aeration on greens and surrounds around slitting treatments rather than verti-draining. Delay verti-draining until later in the autumn but before it gets too wet.
- Disease control was very effective this year. Repeat the same fungicide approach focussing on a preventative treatment with Instrata, Exteris or equivalent in early October followed by Medallion TL in late November. Alongside this make sure the turf is neither underfed or overfed (an autumn application of Invigorator can be considered), remove moisture from surfaces as effectively as possible (switching and dew dispersants), and use iron sulphate to desiccate leaf surfaces.

Green Collars, Surrounds and Approaches

- Make an application of iron sulphate to all green approaches and surrounds with immediate effect. Use straight iron at a rate of 4-5 grams per square metre dissolved in warm water. Get into the habit of making repeat treatments spring and autumn/winter to these areas. Over time we will impact surface pH and discourage worms, and the daisy they bring with them.
- Subsequent daisy infestations shall be controlled using a 2,4-D based herbicide such as Depitox (Sherriff Amenity) as necessary. They must be removed from these key areas where recovery shots are played.

- Adjust mowing patterns from this spring so that approaches and surrounds are extended into the areas discussed. Some additional dressing may be required to facilitate this and at times there may be a need for liquid feeding and wetting agent treatments too. I do not expect instant results in terms of turf quality, but the presentation of the course should improve instantly once this is introduced.
- At fronts of greens the new cut should extend 5-10 metres depending on the type and length of hole. At sides and edges widths will vary but the cut should be wider than previously e.g. left and right of 17, aim to go out 3 or 4 mower widths. All this cutting will be done with the Jacobsen machine fitted with boxes, so clippings will be collected at the same time. Consequently, the larger fairway mower can be kept further away from green complexes.
- Awkward to mow areas should be avoided to minimise scalping.
- Banked areas where cover has been lost as part of the vegetation stripping process e.g. left of 3 etc. should have fescue seed applied to them through the spring. Recovery will be slow paced but natural.
- In future, when greens are aerated, extend passes to approaches as well. In time treatments can extend to aprons too.

Tees

- The tees are still largely dormant and there has not been enough growth to mow any more frequently than once a week.
- It was agreed that all tees should be treated with iron and seaweed with immediate effect to boost growth and target moss in the base of the turf.
- Shortly afterwards apply the NK slow release product in stock.
- If time permits all tees should be treated with the Procore and sanded.
- Increase mowing to twice weekly with growth.

Tree and Vegetation Management

- I am highly delighted with the heathland restoration work which has been completed over the winter period. I have great admiration for those involved both professional and amateur who have dovetailed to make a real difference to the golf course environment at Wirral. The job is far from complete but the physical removal of scrub and understory which was choking the heather and the turf, has transformed this site in a short timeframe and made the experience of playing here faster and more enjoyable. Additionally, it is helping to create a more sustainable product which will be easier and cheaper to manage in the longer term. It is also helping to restore the heathland mosaic of vegetation which should be a balance between heather, gorse, woodland and grassland, all of which combine for aesthetic and strategic benefit. Finally, it will aid drainage too. Not only are clogged up ditches being exposed and re-opened but walls of vegetation which impeded ground level airflow are being broken up meaning that wind can dry the surfaces more quickly. There is no more effective method of drying a turf surface! Priorities for the coming year are:
 - Clearance to the left of 2nd carry (and deepening and exposure of the pond feature)?
 - Clearance to the left of the 5th to connect this area with work already completed on the 6th.
 - Further thinning of silver birch specimens left of the 7th. This shall be done to support work already completed to improve health and safety in this area (the creation of a more accommodating width for the tee shot by removing trees on the left should reduce balls exiting the right hand boundary of the site).
 - Clearance and gorse removal between the 9th and 10th holes. Avoid the creation of linear features. Develop copses of gorse and woodland around which we can re-introduce heather and acid grassland.
 - Clearance between the 11th and 13th. In the same way look to break up lines and develop low level copses of gorse.

- Thinning left of the 16th drive and right of the 18th drive.

All tree work must be done by certified individuals and in accordance with current legislation.

Miscellaneous

- Known pockets of poor drainage are slowly being tackled, for instance the wet area on the 18th has now been drained to good effect by John Mallinson. However, funds for this type of work are limited so utilising your own aeration equipment must be optimised alongside creating channels for airflow which will speed up the natural drying process.
- It is agreed that 17mm verti-drain work will be undertaken on a rolling basis to known trouble spots e.g. left-hand walkway on approach at the 1st, carry at 2nd, carry at 5th and 15th, top end of 13th fairway etc. Aim for two or three passes as soils begin to firm up in the next few weeks. Back off during the summer but return to this programme again in September/October. Much of this is in out of play areas so disruption should not be significant.
- Focus on clearing ditches and jetting drains that can be accessed each autumn. This is critical work to ensure the course is weather-proofed for winter.
- If time permits extend verti-drain work into roughs, and areas where scrub and vegetation has been stripped, to help regenerate heather. Never has there been a better opportunity to do this.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alistair Beggs', with a horizontal line underneath.

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