

Whitley Golf Club – Club & Course Policy 2018

Overview

As we have now entered our 25th year as a club, it seems a suitable point the evolution of the club to produce our first Club Policy. This document will hopefully bring continuity and consistency to the management of the golf course.

Furthermore, we understand that some of our members (quite rightly) will have a keen interest in the management of the course, including the methods and tasks that we practice to produce the golf course in the condition that it is. Therefore, this document will hopefully educate and inform golfers and give an understanding of management's aims and views, and clarify why we perform practices, to the course in the way that we do.

The Club, Traditions, Cultures

Since we opened we have operated with an ethos that 'golf is for all' at Whitley, i.e. everyone is welcome to come and play. In a way, we function how the original golf courses did...it wasn't about who you were or where you are from, it is a game of leisure or perhaps a pastime – for everyone. Some might even say a way of life!

Historically when golf became popular, 'clubs' formed and the members clubs became 'exclusive' and steeped in traditions...of course many clubs still have these traditions in place, though the past decade has seen many members clubs relax certain rules and regulations to try and maintain membership numbers. However, history will tell you that originally the courses were played by everyone and anyone – as golf should be!

In 2015 we penned our Club Ethos:

"We would like to remind members that the club has always revolved around an ethos of being relaxed, friendly & fun. These principles are the foundations of which the club is built upon and we expect all our members and visitors to behave in a manner that facilitates these principles for others.

- RELAXED:

We focus less on 'old club traditions', and take a more casual approach to the club – this includes dress-code (casual but appropriate). Golf after all is an activity of leisure.

- FRIENDLY:

We pride ourselves on the community that our members have created at the golf club. We encourage participation from all players and standards; integrate with family, friends and anyone who wants a game or socialise at the club.

- FUN:

Enjoy your golf and time spent at the club! Have an awareness of others around you and do not behave in a manner that will infringe on their enjoyment.

As a member you take on an active role in contributing to the atmosphere in the clubhouse and on the course, we would like to rely on our members to reflect our collective principles in making the golf club a place that everyone can enjoy. "

As a club & a viable business we need both a steady membership and a strong *pay & play* (casual golfers) following. We accept that despite signage and staff efforts, some pay & play etiquette isn't perhaps 'up to standard'. We ask for members to understand that without these casual golfers, there wouldn't be a club. As a member of the club though, we fully support you to help educate those who aren't fully aware of the etiquette, but please ensure this is in a correct, polite manner.

Objectives

Primarily, the golf course is the main focus for our development, as this is what membership and casual golfers pay money for, however, developing the 'club' as a whole for our members and visitors is also a key aspect to the business. In essence:

We want to provide a course that gives all standards of golfers a fair, but challenging test. We want the course to be playable all year [with the exception of extreme weather]; using grass tees for the majority of the year and providing consistent greens thought-out the year.

These factors are the focus of the Course Management programme of works to meet these goals.

Roles & Responsibilities

Policy making for the Golf Course:

- Jack & Tom Nicholas, Directors
- Captain's Committee [competition secretary, clubhouse manager, club captains & golf professional]

Management of the Golf Course & Greenstaff:

- Tom Nicholas, Director & Course Manager

Management of the Club:

- Jack Nicholas, Director
- Tracey Mallan, Clubhouse Manager
- Keith Brookes, Competition Secretary & Committee Chairperson

Captains:

- John McGeevor, Club Captain; Stuart Bryant, Vice-Captain
- Angela Pomfret, Ladies Captain; Karen Bryant, Vice- Captain
- David Sibun, Seniors Captain; Tony Dance, Vice- Captain

Greenstaff:

- Sam Lovell, Greenkeeping Assistant
- Vic Hackett, Greenkeeping Assistant
- Jamie Davis, Bunker Assistant
- Driving Range Volunteers x 3

Clubhouse:

- Becky Evans, Clubhouse Assistant
- Malcolm Barber, Clubhouse Assistant
- Clubhouse Volunteers x 8

The Golf Course

The golf course was developed 25 years ago [with some alterations to the layout over the years], on former pasture farmland. The ground is generally fertile land, with approximately 1-2 feet of topsoil, then clay. In modern course construction the layout would be considered short, but the skill of golf lies in course management and accuracy – our course lends itself precisely to this.

Course management, and the golf industry in general, is fighting away from golfers being lost in today's 'big hitting', target style golf that has been popularized by coverage of US golf courses on TV in the 80s & 90s...also known as the 'Augusta Syndrome' in the industry publications.

There is a significant shift in the market away from 'target' golf, and towards more sustainable styles of courses, which are typified by traditional style courses. Clubs are expected to have firmer greens and approaches, to encourage more 'bump and run' style courses.

Our work on the greens over recent years has improved firmness, but this is ongoing. The green surfaces are less spongy [caused by thatch*] and soft; we hope to extend this progress to the approaches of the greens and the tee areas as well.

Greens

Objective:

To provide firm & true surfaces that are consistent through the main playing season.

Methods:

- Aeration Programme: hollow tining, solid tining, sarel rolling
- Feed [fertiliser] Programme: use of organic & chemical free where possible to improve soil biology & condition, allowing finer grasses to thrive
- Top-dressing: introduce sand to allow firmer, smoother greens that drain naturally
- Cutting height: 4mm [5-6mm winter]
- Verti-cutting: refines grasses
- Reduce shade: remove trees impacting light access
- Use of Temporary Greens: in severe, wet conditions
- Over-seeding: when appropriate introduce finer grasses to the surface
- Hole position: with improved quality of green, reduce the number of cups per green to 2; and change these more regularly
- Mower: regularly serviced & sharp cutting units

Agronomy Advice:

- Monthly meetings with Avoncrop Amenity Representative
- BIGGA
- Peers in the Industry

See further explanation of why 'Target Golf' is not a desired practice here:

<https://finegolf.co.uk/what-is-fine-golf/lush-target-golf>

Tees

Objective:

To provide firm, level tee areas for use through the majority of the season & reduce reliance on winter tee mats for men's tees.

Methods:

- Development Programme: construction of new, larger tee areas built with better specification
- Aeration Programme: hollow tining, solid tining, sarel rolling
- Feed [fertiliser] Programme: early & mid season; use of organic & chemical free where possible
- Top-dressing: to increase firmness
- Divot repair
- Cutting height: 15mm [limited to cutting with fairway mower & same height]
- Rotation of tee markers: daily men's; bi-weekly ladies
- Winter play: use of artificial mats in winter & / or severe weather conditions

Fairways

Objective:

Maintain the grass coverage to allow fair surface to play. Improve firmness of certain areas that suffer in wetter conditions.

Method:

- Cutting: maintain current cutting heights & schedule
- Aeration: solid tining of wet areas [also assess other drainage options]
- Top-dressing: introduce sand to softer area to improve drainage & firmness

Surrounds & Approaches

Objective:

Improve firmness & drainage by increasing works where resources allow.

Methods:

- Aeration: hollow tining, solid tining & sarel rolling
- Top-dressing: introduce sand for firmness [limit to the holes worst affected by weather]
- Verti-cutting: try to introduce this to surrounds & then approaches in future
- Divot repair
- Traffic: reduce wear by diverting trolley traffic in Autumn & Winter

Rough

Objective:

To maintain a fair surface for golfers to play from.

Methods:

- Cutting: maintain current practices

Eco-Rough [see Environmental Plan]

Objective:

To allow areas of the course, which are mainly out of play, to provide longer grasses to help shape the course & provide a rich habitat for flora & fauna.

Methods:

- Cutting: annual or bi-annual cutting & collection of grass by contractors

Bunkers

Objective:

Provide a hazard that allows a fair chance for recovery.

Methods:

- Raking: rake the bunkers 2-3 times a week
- Sand replacement: annual or bi-annual replacement of sand where necessary
- Re-shaping &/or improving the edges to prevent soil contaminating the sand

Environmental Plan: Golf with Ecology, Environment & Sustainability

The course covers over 50 acres of land and as managers of that land, there is an environmental responsibility to use ecological practices while presenting a fair, yet challenging golf course. Areas for focus are:

Irrigation – to use as little water as possible whilst recognising that during periods of drought it will be necessary to irrigate in order to sustain grass health & growth.

Over watered greens encourages the wrong grasses [for firm, true greens] to grow & the development of thatch. Firm & true surfaces are desired. Furthermore, it is not a sustainable use of our resources of water [cost] and labour hours.

Pesticides [Fertilisers / Fungicides / Herbicides] – minimal use of chemicals by only using when necessary. Use organic products where possible. Healthier soils & grass plants will reduce attacks of disease or the effects of the outbreaks.

Trees & Woodland – maintenance of these areas to provide habitat for flora & fauna. Over the years a number of trees have been planted, however, as they mature a number of the trees cause problems with shading, over-bearing presence or leaf fall. We will look to reduce the number of trees to improve playability this year.

Grassland aka Eco-Rough - Increasing these areas reduce the resources needed with regular mowing, thus allowing time & money to be invested in other areas on the course. The process of annual cutting will thin out these areas, so even if golfers do stray into these areas they will hopefully still be able to find their ball.

With each cut & collection of the rough, the fertility of the soil is reduced, which will gradually encourage finer grasses & flowers to establish, instead of the thicker grasses favoured previously for pasture land. Please note that this is an ongoing process & will take time, but evidence has been positive on current areas.

Waterways – Legislation demands that a 5 metre buffer zone must be used when spraying to prevent chemical leaching into the water course & provide good wildlife habitat. We will be review the water features on the 5th, 8th & 9th holes in due course, with the view of changes to prevent flooding & aid playability.

Hedges – maintenance of overgrown hedges. This is best achieved through the practice of coppicing, pollarding, re-planting & hedgy-laying**. A 1 metre buffer zone must be maintained for spraying purposes, to protect wildlife.

Ditches / Drainage – shallowed or removed in areas. Over the coming years some ditches may be renovated to aid movement of water through the course sub-soil.

In late autumn 2016 we put in some drainage channels on the immediate approach to the 2nd green & to the left of the 7th green. This was successful, but the approach to the 2nd needs to be extended. The 5 green also received a drainage channel at the base of the slope – this still requires regular sand application to smooth the ‘sink’ on the channel. Both the 5th & 8th greens do require further work to help with the surface water.

Other General Policies

Communication (to golfers) – to keep golfers informed we use email, social media & notice boards on a regular basis. Questions and queries

Health & Safety – our H&S policy document is reviewed annually. If implemented properly our policy should ensure:

- *the workplace is safe & without risks;*
- *safe methods of working are set & followed;*
- *machinery & equipment is properly maintained & safe to use;*
- *equipment & harmful substances are used properly & stored safely;*
- *the welfare of employees is not affected by noise, dust & fumes;*
- *employees have healthy working conditions.*

Use of Trolleys, Electric Trolleys & Buggies – in extreme weather we try to restrict the use of trolleys. In Winter months ‘White Flags’ are used to direct golfers with trolleys away from areas suffering damage. In an ideal situation golfers, who are able to, would carry between 1st October & 31st March. We understand that some people are not able to carry and that is fine. We ask golfers to be considered in where they take there trolley.

Machinery – all machinery is serviced annually. We generally replace a machine when necessary rather than a set rotation system. In the past few years we have purchased greens (2013), fairway (2017) & rough (2016) mowers , a range collecting buggy (2016 – secondhand) & various additional equipment.

Course Closure – in extreme weather (rain, snow or fog) we may be forced to close the course to protect the turf. This will be updated on our website & Facebook page.

Professional advice (consultancy / agronomy) – we meet monthly with our fertiliser & pesticide suppliers to discuss the course & conditions of the greens. We also have good relationships with other golf club greenkeeping teams to seek advice. Samples are taken from the greens & tested annually. Furthermore, all industry publications, websites & books are a continual source of information for the Course Management Team.

Review Date: 1st January 2019

Appendix

**Thatch aka Organic Matter – a build up of dead grass & roots that forms a layer below the surface and restricts nutrients & water moving through the soil profile.*

**** National Hedge-laying Society website:**

“Laying hedges is just one of the techniques which can be used to manage hedgerows. Other techniques include trimming and coppicing. Coppicing involves cutting stems off at ground level to encourage the hedge to regenerate. Left unmanaged a hedgerow will continue to grow upwards and outwards and will eventually become a line of trees.

Where farmers keep cattle or sheep a good hedge is essential - although barbed wire fences can easily be erected they do not provide shelter like a hedge. Hedges are important for our wildlife, environmental, heritage and scenic value. A well managed hedgerow is thick and bushy, an impenetrable barrier to sheep and cattle and a haven for wildlife.

Cattle will lean against a hedge and make gaps whilst sheep push through the base; hedge-laying prevents this. Cut stems are bent over at an angle, secured with stakes and in some styles binders along the top, so creating a living, stock-proof barrier. Hedge-laying is the only hedgerow maintenance method currently available which promotes regrowth from ground level and which will ensure the health and longevity of the hedgerow. Once a hedge has been layed regular trimming will keep it in good order for up to 50 years when it may be appropriate to lay the hedge again.”

Useful References

R&A Golf Management: <https://golfcoursemanagement.randa.org/en.aspx>

British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association: <https://www.bigga.org.uk>

England Golf: <https://www.englandgolf.org//grenergolf/default.aspx>

The English Hedgerow Trust: <http://www.hedgerows.co.uk>

Fine Golf Organisation: <http://www.finegolf.co.uk>