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ASHBURNHAM GOLF CLUB

Advisory Report on the Golf Course on behalf of The
R&A Championship Committee
- 2019 Boys Home Internationals

Report Date: 16th September 2018
Consultant: Paul Woodham

Ashburnham Golf Club

Date of Visit:	Thursday 13 th September 2018
Visit Objective:	Course inspection in advance of the 2019 Boys Home International.
Present:	Tim Priestland – Chair of Green, Damion Gee – Club Manager Paul Hopkins – Head Greenkeeper, Paul Woodham – STRI Ltd
Weather:	Dry. Occasional rainfall but with soil conditions remaining dry.

Headlines

- I maintain that Ashburnham have arguably the best greens in Wales and will easily achieve championship standards. The putting surfaces are pure and offer authentic links characteristics running smooth, true and can be refined to whatever pace is required. I would suggest that this will be in the region of 10ft – 10ft 6in (pushing 11ft) depending on weather conditions at the time.
- The greens and irrigated areas of immediate surround and approach have stood up to the rigours of the drought and heatwave well.
- Areas of green approach and surround falling outside of automatic irrigation have lost sward density and live grass cover although noting encouraging signs of natural recovery. The damaged areas are not compacted so recovery should be swift, if aided by aeration, seeding and rest.
- Tees have suffered due to a lack of irrigation. The sprinkler design to tees is old and inefficient therefore it is understandable that the Club took the decision to focus resources and conserve water for green complexes.
- The tees should recover but will need nursing through, with a clear plan for maintenance (aeration, seeding, nutrition and wetting agent), and all Championship areas will be protected well in advance of the tournament.
- There are two small Championship tees which add length to the 10th and 14th holes. Advice has been given to re-turf the 10th tee which is poor, and a similar decision could be taken with the 14th tee.
- Fairways have not suffered the same extent of damage seen through the tees and early signs of recovery is promising. There are some weak areas but not seen as a major concern.
- Fairways are expected to recover well with just a few areas of seeding advised (including the 12th). Progress needs to be monitored and resources in place to carry out light scarification in conjunction with seaweed + sulphate of ammonia, and selective herbicide treatment next spring if required.
- There is a comprehensive plan to allow recovery through fairways and green approaches/surrounds. Fairway mats will be in use along with wide areas of post and rope protection.
- The first phase of bunker renovation, including turf revetting, has established well following completion in March. The turfed surrounds blend well into the links. A second phase of work will complete the project by March 2019 leaving all bunkers in great condition.
- Practice facilities are restricted to short game and short irons only. There is an option to use the long range at Machynys Peninsula GC.
- A project to install a hard standing cart path will benefit the course by minimising wear. The routing should not interfere with play although there will be a need for restoring good turf conditions in areas where the path runs close to greens and fairways/semi-rough.

Key Actions

- Solid tine to introduce new seed into heat stressed areas of green collar/immediate surrounds.
- Hollow core aeration and recycle cores with seeding into green approaches. Continue with wetting agent treatments into the worked areas and afford adequate protection of establishing seed.
- Re-turf 10th Championship tee. Await decision on the need for re-turfing the 14th Championship tee.
- Double disc drill seed tees and manage the recovery of tees swards.
- Localised disc drill seeding through weaker sections of fairway + traffic points and bunker fairway edges. Full seeding through the landing zone at the 12th fairway.
- Monitor the recovery of fairways and review the need for light raking to refine the swards next spring. STRI to advise at the next visit. Selective herbicide treatment will be required.
- Conclusion of bunker reconstruction and revetting work.

Photo Observations and Comments



Figure 1: The irrigated areas of greens and approach coverage have coped extremely well and offer good definition into the green collars.



Figure 2: Heat stress has damaged the unirrigated areas of green approach extending into the fairways. Overseeding is required in addition to coring.



Figure 3: Greens are pure quality. There is no evidence of drought, heat or moisture variance stresses. Sward density is tight and balls authentically interacting through a smooth and true sward texture.



Figure 4: The mature fescue and bent dominant swards blend well with annual meadow grass. Bents need to be kept refined as the can become leggy. The height of cut had temporarily been raised during the peak of the heatwave but adjusted back down as soon as the stress eased.



Figure 5: The 2nd tee was typical of sward thinning sustained in a high wear tee with a lack of irrigation. Overseeding would be required.



Figure 6: Fairways were showing early stages of recovery. There is minimal thatch and fine grass species were re-emerging from dormancy. Coarser texture ryegrasses were outcompeting fine grass species, so it will be prudent to keep these trimmed tightly with mowing and consider provisions for raking/light scarification next year to refine the swards.

Photo Observations and Comments (continued)



Figure 7: Last years reconstructed bunkers have survived the summer well with the turf maintaining a strong cover through the bunker surrounds.



Figure 8: The 4th hole bunkers are to be included in the second phase of bunker renovation. The above image shows the improvement in bunker definition and playability shown in Fig 7 following renovation last year.



Figure 9: The proposed route of the new buggy path rarely comes into play other than running close to the right side of the 1st green. Work will need to be neat through this area and a conscious effort made to restore any damage in addition to recovering the wear and stress damage seen through this traffic pinch point.



Figure 10: The construction of a course route buggy path presents an opportunity to restore areas of hard standing paths i.e. road crossing through the 5th road. The crossing may well be rubber mat reinforced but generally out of play from landing zones and with improved presentation.



Figure 11: Ample size practice putting green and bunker which replicates course conditions.



Figure 12: The practice ground is just 160 yards hitting towards the railway. There is a designated teeing area but not built as a tee. An alternative practice facility is available off site (see recommendations).

Recommendations

Greens

- There is very little other than general maintenance work which needs to be done to the greens to achieve Championship condition next year. Winter management should include regular pencil tine aeration using the Procore 648 unit supplemented by Air2G2 compressed air aeration.
- There is an option to extend the right side of the 16th green into the green collar. This was a section of new green which failed to establish a quality green sward some years ago. The profile has since matured, and the quality of grasses offer a good foundation for a seamless extension gaining an additional 4 yds putting surface and options for an additional pin position.
- There was evidence of pest damage with rabbit activity on the 15th green. There is mature turf available to be cut for repairs from the spare green so we would hope that the ecological management and pest control practices will reduce the risk of damage but there are options for emergency repair if needed.

Green Surrounds, Collars and Approaches

- Target localised solid tine aeration through any weak areas of green collar/surround to create pots for seeding introducing new fescue seed.
- Continue the extension of wetting agent treatments out from greens into green surround and approach areas.
- Much of the late summer and autumn work needs to focus on the green approach areas. The irrigated sections of green approach are fine but beyond this the report has discussed how the turf is scorched. There was very little in the way of soil compaction, but hollow core aeration should be targeted at close centres to allow physical removal and recycling of the rootzone working back into the turf base through brushing with a steel dragmat.
- The hollow core holes will provide opportunity to pot seed fescue to help with the recovery programme to be supported with soil conditioner and seaweed treatment and offering as much protection as possible. Secondary seeding can be applied using a disc drill unit should the Club have the resources to extend seeding the work required on tees and localised fairway areas.

Tees

- All tees should be disc drill seeded with fescue as a double pass operation applying 10-15g/m per pass of seed. Reduce wear as much as possible following seeding and maintain adequate nutrition.
- The Championship tee at the 10th hole will need re-turfing, but full recovery should be seen on the other tees again if ample seeding and protection is afforded.
- Tees would benefit from top dressing to help smooth out any minor inconsistencies and provision should be allowed for wetting agent treatments at the early start of the season again to promote full recovery.
- An early decision needs to be taken on whether the Championship tee will be used at the 14th hole. This would measure nearly 600yds and is not typically used by the Golf Club even recently for the Welsh PGA Championships. The Blue tee measures 553yds and may provide ample yardage especially considering the 10th Championship tee already measures 605yds. If this tee is to be used, then re-turfing will be necessary and ideally with the work done prior to Christmas.



Figure 13. 14th tee options – 320 yds to the lay-up from the rear tee. 260 yds from the Blue tee. The rear tee will need re-turfing if it could be selected but it would be a waste of work for the Club if the tee is not required.

Fairways

- Recovery from the drought and heat damage was seen to be coming back into the fairways at a stronger rate than many courses seen in recent weeks. An application of soil conditioner and seaweed has been applied and there should be provision for a further treatment to stimulate more recovery.
- There will be localised areas adjacent to bunkers and high tops of contours which may require seeding. This could be applied in conjunction with the overseeding of the tees.
- The 12th fairway is historically weak and patchy in sward composition. Given the level of heat damage and divot damage seen, it will be sensible to disc drill overseed this fairway and continue with protection using grass mats into next spring and reintroducing the grass mats use through the landing zone approximately 6 weeks ahead of Home Internationals.
- We should monitor the recovery of the fairways and consider requirements for additional soil conditioner and seaweed applications next spring also with the option for light scarification using a spring tine rake such as a Wiedenmann Terrarake.

Bunkers

- The Club should continue with the second phase of work to reconstruct and re-revet the bunkers. Work should commence on the more open and south facing aspect or steeply contoured bunkers as the turf will need more time to knit early into the winter when higher levels of moisture are anticipated.

Practice Area

- There is no requirement for work to be carried out on the practice ground other than weed treatment through the striking zone of 160 yd practice area.

- The R&A should discuss options for the Club to share practice facility at Machynys Peninsula Golf Club which offers the full length driving range. An agreement has previously been reached between the Clubs to share facilities.



Figure 14: Machynys practice ground is 6.6 miles away (15 min drive). This image is from 2011 in advance of another R&A event. Note: the current condition of this facility has not been seen.

Course Projects

- The Club are to commence a project to install a buggy path through the course during the winter. We discussed the routing of the path and I am happy that the work will not infringe in the playing areas of the course.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Paul Woodham".

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