

THE GOLF CLUB SECRETARY

Briefing and practical advice for golf club administrators

Covid and golf: a local perspective

Alan Davey, a retired golf club manager still actively involved in the industry, reflects on what has been happening at certain golf clubs local to him in the south of England since the start of Covid-19 with the assistance of managers still serving in the region.

As things seemingly return to some kind of normality, many are now asking, "Has the pandemic changed the golf industry for ever?"

As we learned more about the virus, it was clear that golf provided an opportunity for people to engage in socially distanced activity outdoors. It had a clear winning formula.

With some essential 'tweaks', golf clubs were able to get golfers back on the fairways quickly after the various lockdowns and, within its perceived 'safe environment', golf soon appeared to have become the 'go to' activity for many while their normal pastimes were suspended.

Fast forward 18 months and many golf clubs have arguably emerged from lockdown in a better position than when they went in. Furlough helped enormously and this, coupled with an upsurge in membership and increased green fee income, has enabled many clubs to feel a little more future-proofed.

All good then? Well... a bit of digging around and managers are reporting many perhaps unexpected results of lockdown.

On our golf courses, one impact of course closure, furlough and no golf was that normal wear and tear, after what had been a series of difficult winters, had allowed for some good recovery.

'Scheduled periods' for course maintenance were suddenly challenged and, in some cases, changed because of the various re-opening dates during the pandemic. For some clubs, the date changes made for an interesting comparison, if only perhaps to serve as confirmation that maintenance schedules were generally well positioned.

However, 'diplomatic rescheduling' to appease returning members changed years of traditional practices and, for some clubs, there is no firm decision yet on whether they will revert to old patterns of maintenance.

But there were some deeper issues that emerged as well. Staff morale, burn out, greenkeeper capacity against member expectation, and not least, an extended and fast grass-growing season have impacted heavily on greenkeeping teams.

After lockdown, increased footfall, fewer gaps in tee times and, at some clubs, a clamour for earlier starting times all placed pressure on greenkeepers trying to manage normal course presentation. While attempting to meet golfers' needs, many clubs have reported that greenkeepers have experienced difficulties in staying ahead of the field... quite literally.

Quote
OF THE MONTH

"Most people swing as if they were digging for worms"

DAVID LEADBETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 177

Covid and golf: a local perspective

Page 179

On Course - The future of sand: do we need to think differently?

Page 180

NGCAA - Misconduct dismissal

Page 182

Don't let capital expenditure leave you out of pocket

Page 183

Hillier Hopkins annual golf club benchmarking survey

Page 183

Noticeboard

Page 184

Grass Clippings - The management of trees



Changing shoes in the car park is no longer the frowned-upon crime it once was

Add to this the need for ongoing course maintenance and scheduled course improvements, and attempting to do all this during packed days of golf has proved a real challenge. Maintaining the welfare of staff and their health and safety with this amount of activity, along with the health and safety of all course users, has also been challenging!

It has also raised the minefield of overtime, and custom and practice within the industry. For many clubs, overtime is an expectation/necessity for course presentation at weekends, the time when most clubs' premier-paying members will judge the presentation of the course.

Is it a time to review contracts? Yes, maybe. Do you want to review contracts when greens staff are 'down'? Maybe not? If you do go for it, tread carefully!

Let's head to the bar... and catering. Hospitality was subject to complete shutdown. A largely unexpected consequence of this was that many employees in the sector moved into other fields of work. The green light to try different work when furloughed served to demonstrate that life existed outside of their regular roles. The net result for many clubs when emerging from lockdown was a paucity of chefs, bar staff and front-of-house personnel.

How did managers and committees react? Well, for many it provided the catalyst to review opening times and the club's 'offer'. 'Much more focused menus', 'tighter margins', and a general review of existing practices have all been deemed 'a valuable exercise'. Just a few months on and clubs are now witnessing an upturn on the social side and, for some, a return to pre-Covid levels. Have the performance, margins and efficiency of bar and catering continued to improve?

After years of tradition, it was the pandemic that forced a significant review of some existing practices, policies and club rules. The return to golf required an 'about turn' on "please do not change your shoes in the car park". A return to matches saw an easing of dress codes, and even the most traditional of clubs now seem to acknowledge that smart golf clothing is acceptable post-round. We see no jacket and tie after golf, no formal arrangements for a meal after some matches, and when was the last time that port was passed around the table?

What are the next changes and 'relaxations' in clubs - caps allowed in the clubhouse? I suppose the acid test would be to try to imagine the reaction if some of the old rules were introduced now. Purists like tradition, but the reintroduction of some club rules might show them for what they were. Times move on and a significant event can often precipitate quicker change, arguably for the better.

Having experienced enforced change, many club members and managers have seen benefits in adopting procedures that were anathema to many clubs a few years ago. The format of play, course set-up, roll-ups, the number and nature of matches and competitions have all been subject to debate as to their various merits.

All clubs have operated 'tee-time bookings', an act that saw clubs having to abandon - maybe just short-term - their senior roll-ups, ladies' mornings and impromptu cliques/societies. Traditional periods of play have all been thrown into the melting pot. Vets have even been spotted playing in the afternoon!

As for the golf itself, it was, for many just after lockdown, not only a joyous form of outdoor exercise but also a new model that seemed to address certain time-honoured challenges in the game. Slow play, a constant challenge in some clubs, was miraculously solved in part. Speed of play, one might argue, had never been better. Regular tee intervals, being able to identify gaps in the field, no competitions, no requirement to hole out, no bunkers in play and putting with pins in the holes all helped. As if by magic, record numbers of rounds were played and the membership was happy. For some, times were never better.

However, times they are a-changin'. Clubs have identified that the initial relief and exuberance of returning to the golf course have, in part, been superseded. Competitions abound again, matches have restarted and some old chestnuts are being batted around once more. Four-and-a-half-hour rounds are reported as the norm. Mumbblings about course preparation, ongoing questions about refunds for lost golfing opportunities, less provision of services, a reduced reciprocal programme, the loss of some competitions and matches, and, of course, lack of course development (while greenkeepers spend every working hour cutting grass) have all been mentioned.

The Time	Holes	Res. Name	Res. Type	Player 1	Player 2	Player 3	Player 4	Buggy Weeks
05:19	18							01
07:00								5
07:10								5
07:20								5
07:30								5
07:40								5
07:50								5
08:00	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
08:10	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
08:20	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
08:30	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
08:40	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
08:50	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
09:00	18	Members Only	Reserved For Members					5
09:10								5
09:20								5

Many more clubs are now using tee-booking systems but there has been resistance among certain members at some clubs

This is in the face of course supervisors trying to present courses while record numbers of rounds are being played and while still absorbing the impact of less, or no, spring maintenance. Throw in leatherjackets, wormcasts and, of course, the length and density of the rough and some members really are having a field day.

However, as in all clubs, there are some more enlightened members who see that the summer had its benefits. Most courses were looking at their best; fewer society bookings provided them with more tee booking opportunities; and, in many cases, there is now a more equitable process for access to the course.

Tee bookings have allowed for: a greater, improved knowledge of who is on the course and, indeed, whether or not they should be; opportunities to maximise the potential for income at quiet times; and, for the future of the industry, a chance to re-establish competitive but realistic green fee prices.

Club pro shops have been able to manage, monitor and steer green fees away from prime, popular member playing times. And, speaking of pros, they have reported, in most cases, record sales... when stock has become available! It seems that

the spending of any money saved on the abandoned annual golf holiday, or even family holiday, has led many golfers to invest in the most recent technological advances to help performance out on the course!

Many golf clubs are boasting a full membership; many have waiting lists; some have reintroduced joining fees; and many have money in the bank. It appears that clubs probably did have the potential to find their way through the troubled times and emerge in a stronger position, and most seem to have done so.

The challenge now is keeping your members happy and converting the surge of new golfers and green-fee payers into regular players. Increased exposure to the game hasn't necessarily led to people picking up golf in a more serious way.

Debates and final decisions about tee bookings raise expectations and, while appeasing the majority at most clubs, it may frustrate nearly as many when they do not get their way. There are many more conundrums in the days and months ahead.

Are golf clubs in a better place now? Mostly yes - the challenge is staying there! [GCS](#)

ON COURSE



The future of sand: do we need to think differently?



Alistair Beggs, Head of Agronomy at The R&A, highlights the issue of sand and aggregate availability for golf going forward and explains how the Golf Course 2030 project hopes to be able to come up with some alternative solutions and strategies.

Why do many of the greatest golf courses on the planet exist on sand or a sand-based soil type?

The most important benefit that sand provides is natural drainage. A site that is blessed with sand as an underlying medium will rarely have a problem with flooding or drainage issues and will often have a course that accommodates year-round play with a minimum of fuss.



Getting the right sands for bunkers and top dressing looks likely to become increasingly less straightforward

The soils that form on it as turf is established tend to be less productive than agricultural soils and therefore promote a vegetation type that is ideal for golf. In this part of the world, these soils favour slow-growing species such as bents and fescues, which are naturally hardier of drought and disease and provide great playing surfaces with limited greenkeeping inputs.

Also, these courses often have access to a free source of sand for bunkers and for the top dressing of playing surfaces. Furthermore, it naturally blends with the sand underneath so there are no compatibility issues to worry about. Therefore, it is true to say that since the game began, sand-based courses have had an inherent natural advantage over those located on heavier soils, where drainage is naturally poorer, turf more productive and materials for top dressing, bunker creation and maintenance much less readily available.

However, most of our courses do not sit on sand and so venues have had to rely on acquiring it from external sources and suppliers in large volumes. They are very dependent on using it to help ameliorate soils, improve drainage, make playing surfaces more robust and make sites more durable to the climatic extremes we increasingly face.

Nevertheless, as material becomes less available and more costly to produce to the required standard, and problems with transport and delivery make an already expensive material increase in price, it is becoming more difficult to afford purchases in the volume required as well as to justify its movement from one site to another.

Until recently, the sands we need to replenish bunkers (a constant requirement and the more bunkers a course has the greater the demand), dilute organic matter (the natural by-product of growing and maintaining turf) and help to provide smooth and true playing surfaces through top dressing have been relatively freely available. However, like all resources, sand availability is finite and it is becoming increasingly difficult for clubs that don't have access to their own supply (and this is the vast majority) to access the right sort of sands to meet the modern playability requirements of the course.

Often, there is very little warning that a sand grade or source that may have been used consistently for many years is no longer available. A change of physical characteristics and/or colour is often less than desirable and can create aesthetic issues and, more importantly, sometimes root break or other technical and performance issues with turf surfaces.

Although these issues may take a few years to manifest themselves, they are never welcome. This is just another example of a threat to the game alongside those that have been well publicised, including water scarcity, climate change, coastal erosion and changes to pesticide legislation, which are making access to chemical solutions that can resolve pest and disease issues more difficult to source.

The question is: what does the future hold and where are the solutions to help the greenkeeping profession maintain standards and ensure that future generations of golfer can enjoy the game?

The good news is that, as part of the *Golf Course 2030* project portfolio, The R&A has commissioned a study on aggregate availability, which will explore areas such as reviewing the requirements of golf courses for aggregates and how much courses use and really need. It will explore the specifications of materials for use on golf courses; engage with the supply trade to get up-to-date facts on availability; provide the geographical spread of suppliers, sand and other products; and discuss what materials are available, costs and, most importantly of all, how long existing sources will last. Furthermore, it will explore and investigate alternative products and solutions for dealing with shortages and predicted shortages and the impacts and opportunities of using sub-optimal or alternative materials.

There are very important questions that the greenkeeping industry needs answers to in this area. The outcomes of this project are keenly anticipated and will hopefully provide some answers for clubs who are not lucky enough to be located on sand. And, even for those that are, there may be outcomes of interest, which may include sands made from by-products of other industries that can provide an alternative approach to management.

Who knows, it may be that the famous Old Tom Morris catchphrase of "mair sand, Honeyman" becomes outdated as we dress our courses with a different material or even manage organic matter build and dilution in a totally different way. This is the way we need to think as we look to the future of golf. We are at a crossroads for the game and human ingenuity needs to be applied to these challenges and threats to find new solutions. There is always an alternative way, and our mission is to find that way. *GC2030* is the vehicle by which this will happen.

It is hoped that outcomes from this study will become available to the industry in the early part of 2022. [GCS](#)



Misconduct dismissal

Alistair Smith, Chief Executive of the NGCAA, runs through the procedures to follow when looking to dismiss an employee for misconduct to reduce the risk of the matter ending up before an Employment Tribunal, and the crucial differences between misconduct and gross misconduct.

When dealing with employees, there are five potentially fair reasons for dismissal, which are set out within the Employment Rights Act 1996. In order to dismiss fairly, the employer must establish that one of those potentially fair reasons applies and then, having established that fair reason, it must act reasonably when dismissing for that reason which includes, very importantly, following a fair procedure.

There might be some circumstances where an employer might not follow a full procedure, such as when the employee does not have two or more years of continuous service, but we would always recommend that a club takes legal advice if considering such an approach. This article works on the basis of the employee having more than two years of continuous service and we focus here on the potentially fair reason of misconduct and its associated procedure.

1. Types of misconduct

Misconduct is a potentially fair reason for dismissing an employee.

It is good practice to have workplace disciplinary rules that identify unacceptable conduct, the degree of severity with which it is regarded, and how acts of misconduct will be dealt with.

Misconduct may be categorised as 'misconduct' or 'gross misconduct'. Gross misconduct, such as theft or violence, is the most serious type of misconduct warranting instant dismissal, the occurrence of which means the club should no longer be required to retain the employee in his or her employment. An employer may dismiss fairly for gross misconduct without

prior warnings and without notice. The disciplinary procedure should still be followed, with hearings conducted and evidence gathered, as set out below.

Where there is less serious misconduct, an employee must receive at least one relevant warning prior to dismissal. In the absence of gross misconduct, the dismissal of an employee for a first offence is likely to be unfair and, also in the absence of gross misconduct, employees will be entitled to proper notice of dismissal with pay.

2. Fairness of dismissal

For a club to fairly dismiss on the grounds of misconduct, the identified misconduct must be the real reason for dismissal and the club must:

- at the time of dismissal, genuinely believe the employee to be guilty of misconduct and have reasonable grounds for believing that the employee was guilty of the identified misconduct;
- have carried out as much investigation as was reasonable in the circumstances at the time that the employer formed that belief on those grounds;
- have acted reasonably in dismissing for that reason, which includes considering all relevant circumstances (such as background, employee history and record) and whether there are other options to dismissal; and
- have followed a fair procedure, which includes following the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary Procedures (ACAS Code).

It is fundamental in misconduct cases that no decision is made in relation to whether the employee is dismissed until all investigations have been completed and the employee has had a chance to state his or her case. The decision must not, therefore, be pre-judged.

3. Procedure

According to the ACAS Code, before dismissing for misconduct, an employer should complete the following procedural steps:

- (1) investigate the issues;
- (2) inform the employee of the issues in writing so that they know the case against them and that they are at risk of dismissal;
- (3) invite the employee to a disciplinary hearing or meeting, allowing the employee the right to be accompanied;
- (4) conduct a disciplinary hearing or meeting with the employee, allowing the employee to make representations;
- (5) inform the employee of the decision in writing;
- (6) give the employee a right of appeal; and
- (7) act in accordance with any internal disciplinary procedure.

For the purposes of the above procedure, some preparatory steps are therefore advisable as follows:

- check the requirements of the club's disciplinary policy.
- choose an appropriate investigator.
- appoint different people at each stage (that is the investigation, disciplinary meeting and appeal meeting) in ascending seniority (so as to have authority to overturn the decision if necessary).

- keep to timescales in disciplinary policies, avoiding, if possible, using as an investigator or chairperson for the disciplinary or appeal meeting a person who has significant planned absences where this might cause delay to the investigation.
- have regard to the interplay with any related processes (for example, any related grievance process).

A reasonable investigation is a key part of the test of fairness in misconduct dismissals. Where a reasonable investigation has not been carried out, employees may be able to argue that their dismissal was unfair on the basis that the charge against them was not framed accurately and they did not know the case they had to meet, or the employer did not have reasonable grounds for a belief in their guilt. This will render an otherwise fair dismissal unfair. Care should therefore be taken to ensure all matters, particularly those put forward by the employee (even at a late stage), are investigated. This is likely to include interviewing the employee at an early stage plus any relevant witnesses, and gathering relevant documents/information.

4. Dismissal as sanction

Dismissal must be a reasonable sanction to impose. Even where the club has carried out a reasonable investigation and followed a fair procedure, it must still persuade an Employment Tribunal that dismissal was a reasonable sanction in all the circumstances. The Employment Tribunal will ask whether the employer acted within the band of reasonable responses in treating the misconduct as a sufficient reason to dismiss.

The following circumstances may be relevant when deciding whether to dismiss:

- the relevant background to the offence, including previous warnings or similar incidents (see below).
- the employee's length of service.
- the employee's prior disciplinary record.
- whether the employee admitted the offence and showed remorse.
- whether the employee was provoked or acted under stress.

The club should act with consistency when deciding to dismiss, with similar conduct being dealt with in a similar way. The club should therefore consider the sanction that has been imposed on other employees in similar circumstances and act consistently with previous decisions. Any difference in treatment will need be justified, for example on the basis of mitigating circumstances. Clear workplace rules and training can help managers to reach consistent decisions.

Employers should be mindful of their duty to consider all the circumstances and other options to dismissal (such as final warning or demotion, where the contract allows for this), as an Employment Tribunal can still find that dismissal was outside the band of reasonable responses, even where there has been a finding of gross misconduct.

*For more detail on employment law matters, or any other legal matter affecting your golf club, please contact **Alistair Smith** at the NGCAA on **01886 812943** or **office@ngcaa.co.uk** *

Don't let capital expenditure leave you out of pocket

A golf club, like all businesses, needs to make major investment in the club from time to time. Investing in its own assets, such as the course and clubhouse, is key to the long-term success of a golf club. It is important, says **Matthew Bailey**, senior manager at Hillier Hopkins, that capital expenditure be considered up front so as not to leave your club high and dry.

Capital expenditure is, at its most basic, the cost of purchasing new equipment and machinery or the improvement of buildings. These are often high-cost items that cannot be funded through cash reserves. Here are nine funding routes golf clubs may wish to consider.

1. Finance lease or hire purchase

Clubs find it relatively easy to finance fixed assets through hire purchase (HP) or finance leasing arrangements at competitive rates due to the lending being secured on the assets purchased.

There are subtle differences between hire purchase and finance leases. With a finance lease, VAT is paid on inception and the legal title passes to lessees at the end of the period. Depreciation of the asset and interest charges are allowable from a tax perspective, but no capital allowances are available. With hire purchase, VAT is paid on each monthly rental and legal title doesn't automatically pass, although this is often an option. Tax relief through capital allowances would be available on these assets and, as a result, the depreciation would be disallowable for corporation tax purposes.

2. Operating lease

An operating lease permits the use of an asset without the transfer of ownership. This is commonly associated with assets that retain a residual value. It is essentially a rental agreement with no legal title passing to the club. Operating leases provide more flexibility as equipment can be updated more often, but it may not be the best option if the intention is to use the asset long-term. The accounting is currently simpler for an operating lease as the rental payments are just expensed and no asset is recognised on the balance sheet.

3. Bank loans

Bank loans rarely come cheap to golf clubs because they are, in the main, non-profit-making organisations where the usual interest coverage models do not necessarily work. Secondly, there is often little in the way of assets to secure against that borrowing other than the course and clubhouse, and the value of these is tricky to assess when compared against usual property lending. Then there is the question of whether they want to give the course as security anyway. In our experience, club members tend to be happier to provide finance in these circumstances. Clubs often have off-balance sheet assets, such as greenkeeper's or steward's houses, which are easier assets to secure mortgages against, but again the margins tend to be higher than headline rates.

4. Selling property

Some clubs will own property either on or near the course, which they might rent to staff or third parties. Selling property

is an option but clubs will need to consider capital gains tax as often the properties have been owned for many years. Clearly this could be a big decision for a club as once it's gone, it's gone.

5. Member donations

This, obviously, relies on the generosity of members, but is clearly a good option for the club if it can achieve it.

6. Member loans

Clubs may wish to explore loans from members, which can be beneficial to both parties. Discussion will be needed on repayment terms and interest rates, and members will need to consider whether taxable benefits need to be included on personal tax returns. There would also need to be a decision on what would happen if a member were to leave the club.

7. Member levies

With the nature of the membership a careful communication will be needed. Bar levies tend to be more easily accepted as members will likely use the money through the year, with it providing an earlier cashflow boost for the club. However, bar levies are unlikely to be sufficient alone for a large capital project.

8. Increased subscriptions and entrance fees

The key question clubs will need to ask is whether this will result in difficulties maintaining membership numbers or limit the club's ability to attract new members? It is never a decision to take lightly.

9. Existing reserves

Clubs will often look to reserves built up over the years to fund capital expenditure. This is, of course, a route that is only available to those clubs lucky enough to be in that position.

Many of these options will require discussion with members and those discussions must always keep an eye on the impact on future memberships.

And finally, clubs should note that they can take advantage of the super deduction until March 31st, 2023, which allows a 130% super-deduction capital allowance on qualifying plant and machinery investments and a 50% first-year allowance for qualifying special rate assets. Also, the £1m Annual Investment Allowance (currently available until December 31st, 2021) means a club can get relief for qualifying assets up to that amount. However, clubs using the apportionment method for their tax calculations are unlikely to see a significant impact from these.

If you have queries about any of the points raised in the above article or would like to know more about how we can support you and your golf club, please contact **Matthew Bailey** on 0330 024 3200 or Matthew.Bailey@hhllp.co.uk 

Hillier Hopkins annual golf club benchmarking survey

Chartered Accountants, Hillier Hopkins, are once again inviting golf club secretaries and those involved in the management of golf clubs to participate in one of the golf industry's largest and most comprehensive surveys.

The company's annual golf club survey has now been running for over 15 years and is open to both proprietary and members' clubs. The results always provide valuable comparative data and trends in the sector and act as a benchmarking document for golf clubs.

The last couple of years have, of course, been unlike any other for both golf and the wider world, so the information about what has been going on at golf clubs, and how things have been evolving and developing, will be of even greater value than ever when the survey results are published.

Last year's survey revealed increases in a number of areas, some welcome, some less so. The increase in playing membership numbers that the pandemic, perhaps unexpectedly, generated was of course welcome news, and that helped to spark increases in subscription and green fee rates too, along with a return to, or increase in, joining fees at many clubs.

On the flipside, all costs, including staffing costs, also appeared to be on the rise, prompting more clubs to think about how they provide certain services to members including the professional shop and staff, plus bar and catering services.

Will those trends have been maintained throughout 2021, or will other elements of the golf club industry have evolved in different ways?

The annual report continues to receive positive feedback and provides participants with a useful benchmarking tool, allowing them to compare their financials with a nationwide sample of clubs by downloading the reports from the Hillier Hopkins website once published.

We hope you that as many *Golf Club Secretary* newsletter subscribers as possible will be able to find the half an hour or so needed to complete the survey. You can save your responses part way through and go back to it at any time to finish it. Simply follow the "save and return" instructions.

The survey can be found online at <https://fs19.formsite.com/hillierhopkins/GolfSurvey2021/index.html>

The closing date for submissions is November 30th, 2021. 



NOTICEBOARD

GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf to host virtual event to coincide with November's COP26 climate summit in Glasgow

GEO Foundation for Sustainable Golf has announced that it is helping to facilitate a conversation about golf's role in climate change with a special event during the final week of the COP26 global climate summit in Glasgow.

The event, which boasts a strong line-up of contributors, from professional and amateur golf associations to external governmental, NGO and specialist climate experts, is seeking to raise awareness and understanding about the issues and throw the spotlight on some of the work already taking place.

Driving for Net Zero - Golf and Climate Action takes place on Thursday November 11th, 2021 from 3pm to 5.30pm. You can register for free via this link: <https://visitscotland.eventsair.com/scotlands-climate-ambition-zone/public-programme/Site/Register>

Jonathan Smith, executive director of GEO Foundation, said: "The event will emphasise why we need to act, explore what we can effectively do, highlight examples of leadership underway, and introduce new support and solutions developed to accelerate the movement."

Registration launched for BTME 2022

The BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition (BTME) is Europe's leading trade exhibition for the golf and sports turf industry, and BTME 2022 will take place from January 23rd to 27th, 2022 at the Harrogate Convention Centre in North Yorkshire, with registration now open.

The event is free to attend and will feature a line-up of more than 150 exhibitors spread across four halls. BTME is the sports turf industry's premier networking opportunity, bringing together many of the leading names in the sector.

For more information about BTME 2022, head to the new, dedicated BTME website, <https://www.btme.org.uk>.

BIGGA Awards 2022

The winners of the BIGGA Awards 2022 will be announced at a Welcome Celebration for BTME 2022 next January. If you and your greenkeeping team want to be considered, nominations are being invited for each of the following categories:

- Outstanding Contribution of the Year sponsored by Bernhard and Company
- Greenkeeping Project of the Year sponsored by Baroness
- Championship Greenkeeping Performance of the Year sponsored by Origin Amenity Solutions

The Outstanding Contribution award celebrates a BIGGA member whose exceptional work has helped to support fellow members, the industry or the wider community.

The Greenkeeping Project and Championship Greenkeeping Performance awards are an opportunity to showcase a team's successes in the redevelopment or renovation of a course or through the hosting of a major event. Excellent prizes are on offer in all three categories.

More information and the nomination form can be found on the news pages of the BIGGA website at <https://www.bigga.org.uk/news-listing.html> 

GRASS CLIPPINGS

The management of trees



As we head rapidly towards winter, **Paul Woodham**, Head of Agronomy at STRI, draws attention to the problems caused by a lack of autumnal wind and advocates the wisdom of a tree management plan.

I can't believe we are in the winter season already. Weather conditions had been fairly settled during most of October before wet conditions returned. But much of the month endured elevated disease pressure as periods of 24-hour leaf moisture conditions became more common, especially with the lack of wind.

September is typically the calmest month but this extended well into October this year, reportedly contributing to the energy crisis with a shortfall in electricity generated by wind farms. I read somewhere that the year in general has been calm with a lack of persistent windy conditions, although far too much of my time is spent walking around densely planted golf courses, which rarely see good air flow.

On the topics of trees

Trees restrict course air movement and light penetration. Issues with shade were discussed in brief last month, but a nice piece recently published by *USGA Green Section Record* (October 1st, 2021, Vol. 59, Issue 18) discusses *Developing a Tree Management Plan*. This is an excellent article well worth a read and available via the usga.org website. The report suggests undertaking a tree count, which also details age and species diversity as this is information that may help to plan and prioritise planting programmes.

It is interesting where they suggest that, if a course has 5,000 trees, removing just ten constitutes 0.2% of the population.

I guess it depends on which ten trees are earmarked for removal, but how many times have tree removal proposals on golf courses been knocked back because of emotive debate?

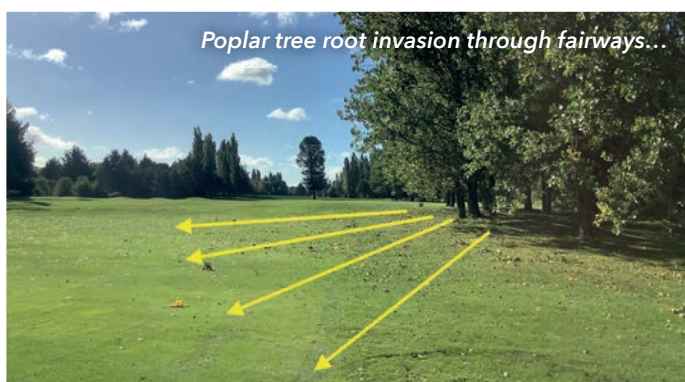
Golf courses are fantastic habitats offering many environmental and ecological benefits, especially where situated as green islands squeezed into urban and industrial regions. Initiatives such as *The Queen's Green Canopy*, *Plant a tree for the Jubilee* should be supported by courses, but as part of a wider plan that will responsibly manage the microclimate conditions we highlight as so important when dealing with turfgrass stress and disease issues.

Late-summer and early-autumn course visits have been interesting as poplar trees are always the first to shed leaves. Turf stress conditions could also be seen where the roots of these aggressive species extend widely through the playing lines of fairways, often protruding dangerously in sections of semi-rough or damaging course drainage by blocking drains. Although sometimes useful for height and defences on the perimeter, poplars are often a time-consuming and unattractive nuisance.

In summary, developing a tree management plan is an important requirement and I like the idea of undertaking a tree count. Maybe this is something that members with ecology interests could become engaged with, working alongside the correct levels of expertise to tie the whole plan together and align the course agronomy, architecture, arboriculture and ecology aspects.

The ongoing leatherjacket issue

One last point for November's *Grass Clippings* is to ensure you are aware that any stock of Acelepryn, purchased under emergency authorisation (EA) for target control of leatherjackets, needs to be used by November 29th. I have seen that, if only a low population of crane fly have been seen to emerge or congregate in mid/late September, it only requires a few to be laying eggs (up to 400 eggs per insect) in the greens to cause damage if the survival rates of eggs growing into larvae is high. Do not waiver on the decision to apply if this was part of your plan. But from a legislative perspective, any product purchased under the 2021 EA needs to be used by the above final date. **GCS**



Poplar tree root invasion through fairways...



can lead to this potentially dangerous scenario

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COMING SOON

More on the topic of trees from golf environment consultant, Dr Keith Duff