

Investing in the future of our golf courses

A question and answer session with Matt Manning, Managing Director of Stoke by Nayland Resort

Our Golf Club is just one part, albeit a vital part, of the Stoke by Nayland Resort and, as members, we are all keen to hear what plans are being made to improve and develop the courses for the benefit of us as a club and for the commercial golf side of the business.

We asked Managing Director Matt Manning to bring us up to speed on what is happening now and what the future holds.



Managing Director, Matt Manning

Q. Before we talk about the future, can you tell us where we are with current projects underway around the courses?

A. “There are some small projects and some big projects where you will see work underway. Perhaps the biggest is the work we have done around the 10th Gainsborough tees with the new concrete pathways and landscaping.

“This is now almost complete, and then we will be doing something similar around the 11th and up to the 17th tees.

“Taking down all the Leylandii trees in conjunction with the Stour Valley Trust alongside 14 and 15 has made a huge difference. The longer-term plan is to replant the area with native trees, but in the short term we will be putting up fencing along there.

“The trees which were taken out will eventually be taken away by the contractor to be chipped, but the ground is still too wet for their heavy vehicles to get on there”.

Q.. What about tee boxes and signage?

A. "The work on replacing stairs will continue. I know there is an issue with the stairs to the 11th and 17th Gainsborough white tees at the moment. Until we have decided on the best replacements there, I would ask members to access these tees from the front and not up the steep slopes. On the 11th, we are currently working out the best way to improve the white tee box. It is too long and too narrow, we need to find a way of making it wider, so that will affect how we rebuild the stairs.

"We are also working on new signage all over the course. Artwork is being looked at now and eventually we will replace everything".

Q. We have just come out of one of the wettest winters on record, when you had to close the courses for periods when it was so bad. How has that made you view the future?

A. "Yes it was a horrific winter and put all of our work back and we did not like having to close the courses. For the future, we are looking at setting up a winter course which we would have officially measured and rated, with mats out all winter to protect our tee boxes. We are working up a full winter policy and will consult with the Management Board later in the year.

"One of the consequences of the bad winter, and several winters before that, is the deterioration of the ball washers around the course. As they froze, thawed and froze again, they have cracked and are no longer fit for purpose. We are currently looking to repair and or replace them now, and looking after them would become part of our winter policy".

Q. It must be difficult reconciling the Golf Club membership with the demands of commercial golf, particularly in relation to tee booking and tackling slow play?

A. "We have a very delicate ecosystem here with a fine balance between members and commercial golf. One can't operate without the other. The Resort won't work without the members, but equally, the income from commercial golf is vital so we have to find ways of making it all fit together.

"We will always commit to giving members tee booking preferences, but there is a finite amount of tee slots available, and you can't have more members than you have tees available so it is something we are always monitoring.

"We are different to a members owned golf club because of our commercial golf side, so we are geared towards fourballs. We don't allow visitors to go out in two balls and we encourage members, especially at busy times, to go out as fourballs.

"We are aware that there are times when this slows the game down and that is one of the biggest frustrations for players, whether members or visitors.

"We are looking at lots of ways to tackle this, but the best way is probably course set up. If you hit your ball into the trees, you are already in difficulty, losing your ball in long grass there just slows the group down, strategically cutting rough back would help. Equally, if you top your ball off the tee into long grass you are already a long

way back, so you shouldn't be additionally punished by also having to look for a ball. These things will make a difference".

Q. Looking further ahead, where are we in relation to the planning for the new golf holes and when can we hear more details?

A. "The planning process we have been through has gone on for years, but we are finally at a stage where we have full planning permission for a nine-hole par three course and an additional 18-hole course. We have only one more condition to satisfy and that is an archaeological dig next month with a couple of trenches being dug.

"Assuming there are no major finds, we should be able to start work fully within a few months and at that point we should be able to share the final course layouts with members.

"There will be a number of changes, but during the five or six years it will take to create the new holes, members will see very little difference other than maybe one or two new tee boxes being constructed on the current courses. All of the new holes will be outside the current two courses so there will be no change for now".