



# STRABANE GOLF CLUB

## Newsletter – February 2021



### FOREWORD

Having just endured one of the most challenging years in recent memory it is imperative that some overdue communication is provided with regard to upcoming plans for the club and course. Whilst these challenges started out almost a year ago back in March with the forced closure of the Club, the knock-on effects continued to be prevalent throughout the golfing season, and furthermore over the winter period.

With the majority of our greens staff placed on furlough, and materials extremely hard to come by, only general maintenance could be undertaken for a significant period of time last year. Whilst the efforts of this work were commendable, it was inevitable that some more deep-rooted issues, pun intended, would set in throughout this period.

This led to the unavoidable requirement for some heavy-duty greens maintenance at what would have been peak time in many a normal season, where a build-up of thatch needed extensive and careful removal. Whilst not ideal for our playing membership, it should not be forgotten that such mitigation is only ever undertaken on a strictly essential basis, and not to provide frustration at regular missed putts!

Whilst this work recovered a lot of the damage which had set in during unique circumstances which were beyond our control, the maintenance programmes, particularly around greens and drainage, are being considerably planned.

The main objective of this newsletter is to highlight these considerations, give some insight to the extent of the issues which will continue to challenge us, and to reiterate that these maintenance and development plans are being discussed with the interest of providing the best possible playing facilities as the top priority.

### COURSE MAINTENANCE

Regular meetings take place between Council and head greenkeeper Paul McFadden in an attempt to fully gauge the extent of the works required throughout the course. Paul's reputation rightly precedes him in terms of both experience and scientific expertise to advise on best practice, not to mention the support of a highly competent crew. These discussions lead to the development of plans and ideas but in the absence of a blank cheque, a prioritisation is required.

**Drainage:** Given the typical climate we experience, in addition to underlying soils and subsoils, adequate drainage is a perennial issue. Estimated costs to fully mitigate these issues across the course would easily run into six-figure sums, and so initial work has been prioritised in areas of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> holes. Costings for these works alone are £20k +, but it is hoped the inevitable improvements will prove investment worthwhile.

**Other Maintenance:** On top of the much-needed priority drainage works, there are a number of other maintenance issues throughout the course which are also being addressed or are being incorporated into a development plan.

As an overview, works so far include - aeration of greens and fringes; scrub to the left of 7<sup>th</sup> tee cleared; new path and drainage at the 9<sup>th</sup> tee, scrub behind 9<sup>th</sup> green cleared; bunkers reshaped, edged and re-sanded; trees and shrubs cleared at the putting green; annual service of machinery.



After two-way scarifying was required last year to remove the thatch which built up during lockdown, options are being explored for equipment and plant which may help in future.

A number of teeing grounds have also been identified for re-levelling, and whilst still costing a significant sum, these types of works are also highly labour intensive.

The bunkers on the course are also being examined, with renovation works already carried out on a number of them. Novel options are being considered to restructure some of the traps with sandbags forming swales to help divert drainage and prevent scouring as a result.

Trees and rough are maintained throughout the course for the benefit of the club and its members. Purchase of equipment to cut heavy rough areas has been looked at, but any such major purchases require very careful consideration in the current financial climate.



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All of these issues are being compiled in to what is hoped will form an Action Plan for the greens staff over the coming years. As with all such undertakings, time and money are the priceless resources and so we ask for the patience of the membership whilst we continue to address these issues with the best interests at the fore.

### GENERAL UPDATES

**AGM:** Plans for the 2020 AGM are still being considered with a virtual platform looking the most likely option. Word will be issued once arrangements are made relating to attendance, submission of queries etc.

**Fees:** Bills for membership fees have recently been issued where a 15% reduction in full fees has been applied as recompense for lost playing time last season. This is a sizeable discount, particularly in relation to other clubs, and will represent an income shortfall of circa £23k. It is at this point that it does no harm to remind ourselves of the importance of our membership, and that without last year's remarkable and much-appreciated loyalty we may not have had a club to return to. A similar effort is required this year as we continue to pull together to bring our Club through these most challenging times.

Payment of fees can be made through the Membership Account section of the ClubV1 App, or alternative arrangements can be made if more suitable to pay in person during restricted office opening hours on Friday mornings. If you have any queries about fees, don't hesitate to contact any Club official and you will be accommodated.

**Reopening:** Whilst still somewhat in the dark about reopening, it is not anticipated that the Club bar will be open before Easter. We are hopeful that the course may open before then but are understandably at the mercy of the Executive on that front. Any positive news will be relayed as soon as it becomes apparent.

**Punters:** The current restrictions have also impacted on the punters club, preventing weekly savings from being collected in person. Members should note that a direct debit option is available and may be most suitable, but options are being explored to come up with a safe and responsible method of making payments.

**Competitions:** The uncertainty is also proving very difficult to plan the competitive season, with sponsors unsure of their positions and Competition Committee without a definitive calendar to plan around. Anyone potential sponsors are encouraged to contact the club for further information - any support is always welcome.

**Car Parking:** Planning has advanced about redesigning the current car park area to allow for approx. 15 additional parking spaces. This will help alleviate the overflow issues

which were a weekly occurrence in recent seasons and it is hoped works will start imminently whilst still closed to minimise any potential disruption.

Passers-by may have noted the addition of a coffee trailer in the car park in recent weeks. Whilst unlikely we have capacity to make this a more regular feature when the season kicks off, passing trade is encouraged for now.

**BRS:** On the topic of planning, members may notice a few tweaks to the BRS system also when back up and running, with the options of making anonymous reservations no longer available. Whilst driven by the need to maintain a register of all attendees, this should also help increase availability of times. BRS is constantly under review, scrutiny and, unfortunately, criticism. The anomaly of booking tee times is a wicked problem with no ideal solution. Members should rest assured that there is a lot of deliberation on these matters and the system in place is deemed to be the best available. Whilst we understand that 100% satisfaction is an idealism, we also hope that members appreciate this balancing act and that decisions are taken which are deemed to be the most fair and inclusive for all. Further feedback from members may be sought via some surveys throughout the season.

**Lockers:** Following the success of the recent locker room refurbishment members are politely reminded to please be careful when their golf equipment is being placed in or removed from their locker. As per previous, it is advised that wheels be removed from trollies and that locker doors are never opened or closed forcefully. As always, members are thanked in advance for their cooperation on such.

**Facebook:** A members-only Facebook page is also being considered. This would provide an ideal platform for in-house discussions to be had and news to be circulated. Whilst healthy debate is essential for progress, the public facing 'shop window' of the Club is not always the most suitable place for it. Again, any progress on this will be relayed as and when available.

### FINAL WORDS

Whilst we look forward to getting back to the sport we love at some point in the coming months, the Club would like to thank all members for their patience, cooperation, loyalty and support over the past year. We hope to build on the inspiration taken from this, hope that all our members stay safe and well in the interim and look forward to reopening as much as the rest of you!

*"Teamwork is the secret that makes common people achieve uncommon results."*