Winter course management Q&A

As the UK shivers through another cold snap, Jim Cook finds out what plans greenkeepers have been putting in place for the winter months.

Andrew Geddes – Clitheroe GC

1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?
Fairway drainage, levelling and improving tee surfaces, bunker renovation, improving walkways, woodland management and dealing with e-mails from members.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?
We discuss the programme of work six months in advance with the appropriate committee, and produce a monthly report informing members of the winter projects. Depending on the size of the project, holes may be closed down or shortened.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?
Ground conditions at Clitheroe aren’t suitable for contractors in the winter, although we have used Duncan Ross to install drains in the summer.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?
Yes, provide discreet hard standing access areas to the parts of the course where the winter project is taking place, also use boards and ground guards for shorter runs. Try to leave watercourses unaltered.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?
We focus on finishing our major ground work before Christmas, smaller projects and woodland management commence in the New Year.

Andrew Mannion – Southerndown GC

1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?
Mostly bunker rebuilding work; we are currently installing Ezelevator bunker using Adjustable Gravel Bases. We take in about three winters to complete the whole course. We’ll also be resurfacing and building several tees and managing grass on the golf course.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?
Before any work starts, it will be advertised on notice boards and also on the club’s website. Because the bulk of our work is bunker related at the moment we use drop zones on any bunkers that are GOR to speed up play and stop any confusion.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?
We’re lucky to have a good selection of equipment to enable us to carry out our own work. We are able to facilitate the work.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?
Yes, provide discreet hard standing access areas to the parts of the course where the winter project is taking place, also use boards and guard stones for shorter runs. Try to leave watercourses unaltered.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?
We tend to just carry on and anything that can be carried over to the following autumn/winter season will be. I’m lucky the club understands that over the last five years the weather has played a significant part in what we can complete.

Gordon Brammah – Hallamshire GC

1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?
Many and varied depending on the number of funding areas including course development policies, budget restrictions, available equipment and the weather. We have built new tees, putting greens and stone walls, installed drainage systems and improved paths, and every bunker on the course has been rebuilt.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?
Communication. Members are more likely to complain about disruption if they are not kept informed about work on the course. A monthly greens report posted in the clubhouse or better still on the club’s website will head off many awkward questions later on.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?
Contractors would be used for three main reasons – if specialist equipment is required, if specialist skills are required and if a project has to be completed within a limited timescale. An honest assessment has to be made by the club before pressure is just put on to do the work in house.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?
Planning is key. Getting major projects completed early in the autumn before the weather changes will give more time for the course to recover. Have contingency plans for if the weather causes serious delay and don’t recommit with the number and scale of projects planned.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?
We have a good relationship with the members and the greens committee is essential. Course managers should resist taking on projects that are not properly planned and funded and they must fit into a realistic winter programme.

Robert Ransome – Diss GC

1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?
During the winter months we’ll complete a variety of projects such as building and erecting nesting boxes, tree and hedge work, bunker work, bunkering and extending the winter programme. All our work plans are discussed at committee level three to five months prior to being done. The information is then fed to the members through the notice board, website and newsletter. If there is an emergency and the membership will be aware of the conditions to expect.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?
We’ll give more time for the course to recover. Have contingency plans for if the weather causes serious delay and don’t recommit with the number and scale of projects planned.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?
Normally we would do all our work in house but we are using contractors to rebuild our greens as they have the proper equipment and expertise to do the work alongside the architect employed by the club. Any large drainage work would also be sub contracted to someone in that field.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?
To a point but normally the weather dictates how much you can achieve. We always try and get the bulk of our winter work done before Christmas. We start projects early in October to make the best of the good weather. We would normally have one aerator on fairways and the presentation will be better.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?
We always plan ahead to ensure that everything is done to minimise time and disruption to play. We communicate to our members via notice boards, emails and newsletters and in most of our construction projects we also provide pictures of what these areas will look like once completed.

Robert Patterson – Royal Aberdeen GC

1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?
Hunker work, rebuilding and extending teeing areas, and an intensive aeration programme on all areas with verti-drains and hollow coring machines. We started a five year plan last year to rebuild seven greens on the main links, in terms of the very old turf root material. We are doing the 18th green at the moment.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?
All our work plans are discussed at committee level three to five months prior to being done. The information is then fed to the members through the notice board, newsletter and notice board. If there is an emergency and the membership will be aware of the conditions to expect.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?
We normally use our own work force but we are using contractors to sub contract work that is not properly planned and funded and they must fit into a realistic winter programme.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?
To a point but normally the weather dictates how much you can achieve. For the last 3-4 years we’ve balanced our winter programmes to give us options, so if projects get put on hold, we can temporarily switch over to another until we can resume. Generally, if a project is safe and ground disruption is minimal we’ll stick with it.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?
We ideate two or three members of the team to daily course preparation. When monitoring progress, if we come under pressure to complete I have the options to either add an additional team or increase our ground staff numbers. This may come at a temporary cost to the course.
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4. Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Planning is the key. Getting major projects completed early in the autumn/winter before the weather closes in will give more time for the course to recover. Have contingency plans for if the weather causes serious delay and don’t recommit with the number and scale of projects planned.

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Developing a good relationship with the members and the greens committee is essential. Course managers should resist putting on projects that are not properly planned and funded and they must fit into a realistic winter programme.

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We usually plan ahead to ensure that everything is done to minimise time and disruption to play. We communicate to our members via notice boards, emails and newsletters and in most of our construction projects we also provide pictures of what these areas will look like once completed.

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We try not to plan ahead to ensure that everything is done to minimise time and disruption to play. We communicate to our members via notice boards, emails and newsletters and in most of our construction projects we also provide pictures of what these areas will look like once completed.

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Normally we would do all our work in house but we are using contractors to rebuild our greens as they have the proper equipment and expertise to do the work alongside the architect employed by the club. Any large drainage work would also be sub contracted to someone in that field.

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Hunkering in the winter with rebuilding and extending teeing areas, and an intensive aeration programme on all areas with vertidrain and hollow coring machines. We started a five-year plan last year to rebuild seven greens on the main links, to improve the very old root zone material. We are doing the 18th green at the moment.

2. If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

All our work plans are discussed at committees level three to five months prior to being done. The information is then fed to the members through the notice board, website and newsletter. If temporary greens are required we will be in advance and the membership will be aware of the conditions to expect.

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4. Are there ways to minimise winter projects being affected by the weather?

Gordon Brammah, a top 12 winner in the Moor Town GC, taken by Michael Joyce, January 2013.