FOCUS ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES

What price municipal green fee golf?  

"We are trying to get a message over before we witness the downfall of municipal clubs as we know them."

Many of us are fully aware of the Government's intentions regarding compulsory competitive tendering for golf courses, but a lot of the public course clubs do not realise they have to protect themselves and their members.

This they can do by insisting with their local authority that they have the right to see and read the specification that has been drawn up by the local authority, who have to list "how things are to be done and when they are done" the club must use their right to insist that their rights are protected by ensuring the local authority put into their spec's the right to take over the course does not have to work to the spec; laid down at the time of the tender, whereas we know them.

In this feature Greenkeeping Management is attempting to get this message over before we have to witness the downfall of municipal clubs as we know them.

Demands are already being made on the clubs that have failed to find out these facts and are now tied down with red tape. The National Association of Public Golf Courses is at the forefront of the fight and it is with their help that Greenkeeping Management is presenting this feature.

Mike McCellen
Editor

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The Specification

The specification is a very detailed document giving information and setting standards on every aspect of the service provided. If the specification is perfect, and the contractor adheres to it, the customer using the service should not be able to detect any difference in the service, whoever is carrying out the work.

The specification for managing sports and leisure facilities might cover the following areas:

- Description of area, description of service, changes in policy, improvements/expansion of the service, pricing, monitoring of performance, financial records, management information, sponsorship, purchasing, stationery, management, staffing levels, staffing qualifications/validity, experience, standards of dress/uniform, training, opening hours, programming, booking system, marketing, advertising, security, upkeep of facilities.

Action for Clubs

This note is not necessarily exhaustive, but is intended to act as a reminder, or checklist, of issues which clubs based on municipal golf courses should discuss with their local authority. Remember, if anything is not included in the specification, the person or company who wins the contract is under no obligation to provide it.

Because of the financial objectives which have to be met, anything outside of the specification will be the subject of a variation order which could be expensive.

(a) Seek an early meeting with officers of your council’s Leisure Services or Recreation Department to discuss the club’s position in relation to competitive tendering and, in particular, the specification.

(b) Find out how the local authority intends to package the contracts and what the timescale for going out to tender will be.

(c) It is likely that the local authority will be taking the opportunity to review its policy and operation. Find out if this is the case, what is under review, how it will affect the club and how you can help in that process.

(d) Is the local authority on any charges likely to remain the same? What about season tickets? Any price concessions for club members? What about other charges — lockers, hire of equipment etc? Are juniors protected?

(e) Has the club any arrangement to book the first tee for competitions? Is there a difference between regular arrangements (e.g. twice a month for competitions) and special occasions (e.g. Captain’s Day)? Are they also protected?

(f) What are the booking arrangements? Will they remain the same? How much notice will be given for regular bookings and special occasions?

(g) Is there a formal route for consultation between the club and the local authority. If not, use this opportunity to establish one. Don’t appear to be in the position of always asking for something. Your expertise may help the local authority in preparing a specification or monitoring the contractor’s performance.

(h) Are there rules about priority on the first tee? More than one starting point? Competitions having priority etc? Often these rules are not written down, but in future they may need to be.

(i) Have NAPGC competitions been considered? If there are existing arrangements, are they included in the specification? What about future possibilities — hosting the NAPGC Open?

(j) Does the club have any arrangements for visiting players or teams in competitions (concessions, priority bookings etc)? Make sure that they are protected in the specification.

(k) Does the club have any arrangements for catering (for visiting teams, for example)? Are the arrangements protected?

(l) Does the club have any arrangement for use of any part of the clubhouse either permanently or for special occasions? Office space, storage space or use for special events are examples. Make sure that your use is protected in the specification.

In this article we examine the myriad of ways in which Government legislation could affect the running of municipal golf courses. Thanks for the information goes to the National Association of Public Golf Courses.
(m) Does the club have any notice-boards, trophy cabinets, honours boards, displays of photographs etc? Is the right to continue them protected?
(n) Is there any relationship between the club and the Professional? Find out whether the Professional’s terms are to be altered and how they will be considered under a contract. Will the Professional be contracted to the council outside the management contract or will it be left to the discretion of the Contractor?
(o) Are the proposed course opening hours any different? Who will decide whether the course is fit for play?
(p) Does the club have the right to have fund-raising events (prize draws etc)? Is that right protected?
(q) Do the council’s staff at the Golf club carry out any administrative functions for the club? Can they be detailed and included in the specification?
(r) What are the insurance responsibilities of the club and the council? Will they be affected?
(s) What are the council’s rules about sponsorship and will they be written into the specification? How does this affect sponsorship for club competitions?
(t) Finally, has the club considered submitting a tender? Discuss the possibility with the local authority.

There are bound to be other issues to be considered because every arrangement is different at the moment. Perhaps you could use these notes as a basis for a brainstorming session at your own club Committee meeting and other ideas may crop up.

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The U.K. manufactured Hauler AT500 is an economical load carrying all terrain vehicle that is easy to manoeuvre in tight spaces.

The high flotation tyres minimise compaction, enabling many tasks to be carried out without damage to the land. The AT500 can take a range of turf-care equipment and trailers, in addition to being capable of moving a wide range of boats or caravans around suitable sites.

Both 18 horsepower petrol and 15 horsepower diesel engined versions are available. The range of options include a cab, full lighting kit, and hydraulic tipping. Mesh cages suitable for transporting stock or leaf and litter collection can also be supplied.

ATTERTON & Ellis offers a range of machines to sharpen all sizes of cylinders and bottom blades. The ‘Master’ cylinder grinding machine is designed for sharpening large quantities of heavy duty cylinders and is suitable for machines having up to 106cm (42in) cutting width.

The company’s “Express Dual” cylinder grinding machine is capable of both “in-situ” or plain cylinder grinding on a wide range of lawnmowers. When used “in-situ”, the complete mower is located centrally on the machine and locked into place, the grinding cycle taking place without the usual ‘strip-down’ of the mower. Separate cylinder grinding may also be undertaken when the busy periods are over and the mower requires a ‘full’ service. Bottom blades have to be removed for separate grinding.

A ‘Public Authority’ version of the Express Dual is available featuring a heavy duty mains electric motor. A ‘Professional’ kit to enable “in-situ” sharpening of a wider range of cutting units is also available at extra cost. The “Pilot” plain cylinder grinding machine is produced to meet the needs of the smaller workshop — say 5 to 10 medium sized mowers and incorporates the essential features of the other machines, but without the high capital outlay.

Arranged for bench fixing, the “Pilot” features the “Easitrue” system of setting up which combines accuracy with simple mounting.

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GRASS TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL

G RASS TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL of Stirling, Scotland and Roscommon, Ireland is a new Consulting Company founded to meet the agronomic demands for new Golf Course development and offer expert advice in management of established courses throughout Britain, Ireland and Europe.

The Principals of GTI are John Souter and Eddie Cor-naughton and the combining last year of the former's 20 year experience in construction and drainage and the latter's 10 years greenkeeping experience in Ireland and the USA coupled with a Bachelor of Science degree in Turf Management provided an excellent base to offer a complete service to the expanding and established golf market.

The services offered by GTI range from full site feasibility studies to determine if a site is suitable for a Golf Course development or simply a soil/sand analysis to determine quality and consistency. The company is very involved in offering advisory visits to established courses to update and refine management programmes to achieve desired course conditions. These on site services are backed up by a comprehensive laboratory for all soil/sand analysis.

The need for proper specifications in today's expanding market is never more apparent. With the demands on golf courses for year-round play and super-fast greens the need to built correctly the first time is essential. With our comprehensive drawing office and computer aided surveying and design it is possible to draw up exact specifications to architectural drawings which can then be quoted for on a fair basis.

The specifications, once used, are monitored during construction through to opening - with materials approved all along the way. The client is, at all times, made aware of progress regular site meetings taking place.

With the reputation of our company expanding in a short period of time we were approached by the architect in charge of the new golf course at Euro Disney in Paris.

The Ronald Fream Design Group realised the limitations of the clay site in Paris and approached GTI to carry out a full contour survey and prepare a drainage plan with specifications for the 150 acre site. This site will be monitored by GTI from start to finish and thereafter the maintenance for the growing-in period with continual advisory visits once opened for play.

From this initial contact with Ronald Fream we now have designs on the boards in the London area, in Perthshire, Scotland and in Portugal.

The ability to carry out a site feasibility study, design the golf course, make-up construction and drainage specifications, supervise construction and advise on aftercare maintenance gives GTI the most comprehensive in-house service available to golf courses be they 'new or old'.