

# GREENSIDE COMMENT

The consultancy document from the Greenkeeping Panel of the R & A, was officially launched at the beginning of November with the expected 'bombshell reaction' from the national press.

The Way Forward, reviewed in part in last month's edition of *The Golf Course*, by Jim Arthur is a hard hitting criticism of the management and maintenance programmes of most of Britain's 1,800 member and public courses.

Much of the blame is laid fairly and squarely on the antiquated club management practices in member run clubs, who have persisted in keeping a Committee structure, which has proved inefficient, ineffective and quite unable to cope with the vast increases of play.

It is said committees are in the main far too large, particularly the Green Committee, whose technical knowledge is described as "either non-existent or at best woefully primitive". It is suggested they should consist of a maximum of three - The Head Greenkeeper, Green Chairman and the Club Secretary.

The panel also suggests that many Committee members take office more as a step on the social ladder, rather than in an attempt to make a meaningful contribution to the well being of the course and the interests of their fellow members.

They also accuse committee attitudes to greenkeeping as "astonishingly disorganised, penny pinching and arrogant".

Committee interference by those whose qualifications consist of a farming connection or an interest in gardening, together with low inadequate budgets are blamed for the increasing problems of course condition. It is suggested that even in winter it is possible to have mud-free fairways and firm fast greens, but all too few courses experience these conditions because of the lack of expertise.

The heart of the problem, which the panel under the Chairmanship of Tim Taylor see as the root cause of much of the troubles on British courses is the attitude of golfers, who expect their course to look like Augusta.

Club members and their elected representatives have failed to take into consideration different climatic conditions and maintenance costs, and in an attempt to produce target type greens have over-fertilised and over-watered. This has led to an increase in annual meadow grass, thatch build-up and wet, muddy conditions.

The recent 2p per head levy by the Golf Course Unions on club membership to

finance Greenkeeper Training is described as "totally inadequate" and they recommend it should be increased to 50p, rising to £1.

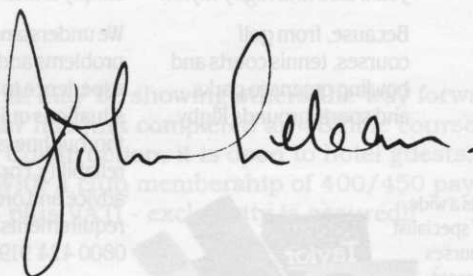
What should be worrying to any golf club is the allegation that some suppliers are using business methods which at best are described as "questionable". It is suggested that greenstaff are offered various inducements from some trade companies to purchase materials.

It is common knowledge that there are suppliers, who both through advertising and their representatives, offer clothing, glassware and other personal items to gain large orders, at the expense of bulk discounts, which should be passed on to the club. This practice according to the document is only excusable because of the "penny pinching attitude to greenkeeper salaries".

The R & A are to be congratulated on the publication of this document, which has appeared "warts and all", as the R & A have not escaped criticism themselves. They have incurred the wrath of their own greenkeeping panel for continuing to allow host clubs, together with championship committee agronomists to prepare for major events.

The new generation of golf course architects, mainly professionals with no architectural qualifications also receive a side-swipe. Reservations are expressed that too many of the new course developments will be difficult to maintain by greenstaff, because the constructions are unsound and sited on unsuitable land.

There is much to read in *The Way Forward*, together with a great deal of common sense. One can only hope that the criticisms will be regarded as constructive, those involved will take heed before it is too late and a conscious determined effort will be made to correct at least some of the problems.



EDITOR