

GREENSIDE COMMENT

Some four months have passed since the R & A Document 'The Way Forward' was published and widely distributed to golf clubs in Britain.

It is perhaps surprising that despite its depth of circulation and the resultant press coverage, the amount of discussion in the place where it matters - the Club Committee, has been somewhat meagre. Enquiries among a number of golf clubs has produced the reply that the document has been received, but they have not as yet debated the issues.

Where clubs have grasped the nettle, there has been, what could be described as a jaundiced view expressed over the section entitled - The Club Committee Structure, which probably reinforces the findings of the Greenkeeping Panel that the majority of golf club committees in the UK are old fashioned, resistant to change, using committee membership as a means of achieving a place in the hierarchy.

Few clubs can claim to have a streamlined management structure. Although there is a trend to appoint full time Manager/Secretaries, the majority soldier on with a willing retired member, whose responsibilities are rarely matched by the degree of authority to carry them out.

Day to day decisions often become the subject of debate at the next full meeting of these autocratic and autonomous bodies, whose principle aim is to keep capital expenditure within the limits of annual subscriptions, adjusted to the increase in the retail price index.

No committee relishes calling an extraordinary meeting to propose a subscription increase, because they have to show cause for its justification increase. Attend any such meeting and it will be packed with a majority of the club elders who are quite content to see their day's out on a course shortened to suit their game at a price per round about equal to the tea and sandwiches bought in the club-house.

Fortunately not all British golf is dominated by this malaise. A glance around one's own area of play will spot the club whose foresight has already led to major investment and improvement. These courses will reap the benefit at the expense of their laggardly neighbours.

Golf, in stock market terms is on a high. Now is the time to improve the assets in the private club, both on the course, the equipment, facilities and staff development. New courses are coming on stream at an increasing rate, all with commercial

backing. It from this quarter, competition for membership will emerge. Those that cannot match value for money golf will be returning their fairways to grazing sheep.

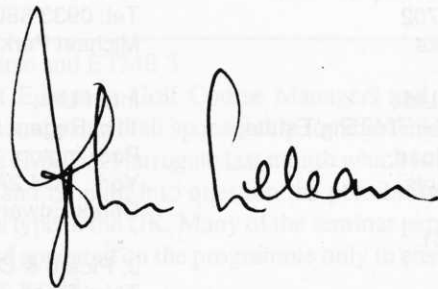
Turning to the main theme of 'The Way Forward', mention must be made of the condemnation of our most prolific grass species - the dreaded poa annua. Committees who have studied the relevant parts of this document have commented that much has been said about the encouragement of bent/fescue greens on the championship courses, the majority being links or heathland where such grasses can thrive, albeit by using approved cultural techniques.

Where, they ask, is there any advice within the document for the majority of inland golf courses, many built 70 to 80 years ago to the approved specifications at the time, designed by names that are now legend in terms of golf course architecture.

These are the golf courses close to centres of population where pressure from increased play by both members and green fee paying visitors has stretched turf maintenance to the limit. Although a bent/poa green surface is possible, to find fescues, is like looking for the four leafed clover.

Whilst accepting that the R & A Greenkeeping Panel are expressing the purists view it must not be forgotten that the backbone of golf is now played, summer and winter on less than ideal courses. We would all like mud free fairways, firm fast greens and a close sward for the tees, but the answer is not the elimination of Poa Annua nor is it practicable or possible, though reduction should be the aim.

Perhaps the next edition of 'The Way Forward' could turn its attention to those of us who are just as keen as the privileged links golfers, but are limited in our weekend pursuits to inland courses built on less than ideal sites, with or without the fescues.



EDITOR