

# GREENKEEPER

International

## Editorial Comment

# 'Way Forward' hits a major obstacle

This month's issue was to have included a light-hearted seasonal chiding addressed at green committee men, under the title 'twenty things for your green committee to consider in 1992'. Whilst I was indeed feeling in a sufficiently frivolous mood at the beginning of November to make the selection from the dozens of ideas that had filtered through during the year, my heart sank rapidly on learning (from a show of hands) at the excellent seminar at Cannington College that only a handful of the 120 delegates gathered had ever heard of the discussion document 'The Way Forward', and that only three had actually read it! What made Eric Shiel, who posed the question, and me even more incensed was the suggestion offered by one delegate that this was easily explained. The document, he opined, being critical in its comment of archaic committee practices, especially that of lack of continuity, had been effectively suppressed by Club secretaries and green chairmen.

To quote directly from the R&A document: 'An interest in gardening or farming is deemed sufficient expertise to enable members to dabble in the running of the course... lack of continuity is an inherent problem, though in many Clubs there is often one brave soul who will battle on as chairman/convener until he tires of the yearly abuse thrown in his direction from impatient golfers. His thankless task includes attempting to protect his green staff from the more belligerent members, and fighting in general committee for sufficient funds with which to manage the course. All in all, it cannot be said that the mechanisms of general or green committees are even remotely satisfactory as a way of running a golf course. Whatever else may be wrong with the many forces impinging on course management, there is no doubt that the committee structure (and the fact that those taking bad decisions will not even be faced with their consequences in the longer term,) represents a most serious obstacle to meaningful progress. Perhaps *the* most serious'.

With a liking for figures, I calculated there were about 100 greenkeepers at Cannington and in taking the insignificant figure of those who were aware of 'The Way Forward' - generously, say 5% - and computing this nationally, the likelihood is that less than 200 greenkeepers from our membership of 4,000-plus have read the document. Taken a step further, from that 200 perhaps less than half are head greenkeepers, this from a total of over 2,000 British Golf Clubs!

Where does all this lead, you may ask? Instead of listing 20 considerations, I put it to Club secretaries, all save the few that are part of a more enlightened structure, ie. with a green committee consisting only of chairman, head green-



keeper and secretary, and having clearly defined long term policy documents on course management, (Letchworth and Wishaw spring to mind as examples), to make Xerox copies of all 33 pages of 'The Way Forward' available to both their head greenkeeper and to all incumbents, both long standing and newly elected, who serve on committee. Further, I urge all Clubs to discuss and continuously act upon the implications of the document, and the national golfing media to broadcast the essentials which golfers really need to know in relation to golf course management. Acting upon the recommendations of 'The Way Forward', they will discover true salvation for Club, golf course and greenkeeper.

I am thankful to have this editorial column as a 'soapbox', for not only does it give me the opportunity to sound off on such matters as 'The Way Forward', but also to thank those who have made 1991 an exciting and eventful year in publishing. In particular my gratitude to the talented contributors, the BIGGA section reporters for splendid input to Around The Green, the staff at Aldwark Manor for valuable support; especially when I seem to have lost my way with the word-hungry computer; and most of all to the rank and file BIGGA members, dedicated folks all! May Christmas bring great joy to you all and the new year herald peace and prosperity throughout your world.

DAVID WHITE

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