

The average golf club membership of today is much more active than in yester year. Most members play more regularly and expect higher standards on the course than ever before. Indeed deficiencies in the golf course itself are often used for excuses for poor play as players are less willing to accept the "rub of the green"

So who would be a member of a Green Committee at a time like this? Green Committee members often have to be very thick skinned to be able to fulfil the duties and obligations of their office. There can be great satisfaction from seeing the golf course in immaculate condition, and the membership enjoying its golf. However, it is usually impossible to satisfy everyone and many clubs have a group of dissidents who will complain whatever happens.

So before we start discussing the role we should give three cheers for those individuals who are willing to give up their free time to receive a lot of flak and ear-ache from other members who are more vocal but less active in running the club.

Who then makes up the Green Committee?

The exact composition of the Green Committee can vary from club to club. It usually contains members of the ruling body, be it a council, main committee, or board of directors. A Chairman will be elected who may be in office for one or more years with other committee members taking their turn. Membership may include past Captains, the Secretary, the Professional and, of course, the Head Greenkeeper. Representation from the membership would hopefully include a range of playing abilities so that the course is not set for either high or low handicappers. In addition, there may be other groups within the club which may wish to be represented but if the committee is truly representative it can become unwieldy and very difficult to manage and requiring strong Chairmanship.

It has been said that the Green Committee should contain no more than one member ie the Chairman. However, this is extremely unrepresentative and may lead to conflict in the club but clearly if decisions are to be made quickly and efficiently there should be as few people as possible involved in the decision making process. At the sharp end I would suggest the Green Chairman, Secretary and Head Greenkeeper are all that need be involved in the day to day working of the course. The Vice Chairman of the Green Committee would deputise for the Chairman when he was unavailable. It must be remembered though, that the running of the golf course has usually been delegated to the Head Greenkeeper who is a full time professional. There is nothing to be gained from the Chairman of the Green Committee deciding to take on the role of Course Manager. Such intrusion into the day to day running of the course will only cause frustration and difficulty for any Head Green-

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keeper worth his salt. But if running the course on a day to day basis is not the role of the Green Committee what is?

Duties and Roles

The duties and roles of the Green Committee will be defined by each individual club. They will have a different set of circumstances which will define what they require of their elected members. However, the following roles and duties will probably be required of every Green Committee.

Policy Determination

The prime function of any executive is to determine policy for the future. It is amazing how many clubs seem to go from year to year changing with the whims of every new elected body. This is extremely poor management as far as the greenkeeping staff are concerned as they have no idea of their long term aims and objectives. The club should therefore be able to develop a simple and straight forward policy on how they wish to run and develop the golf course over the next 20 to 30 years. From this policy document an implementation document can be developed.

Within the policy document items such as course layout and development, course reconstruction, course shaping and presentation, course ecology course manning levels, machinery and responsibilities should be discussed.

The club can also be "with it" in management terms by developing a "Mission Statement" for the future which gives a simple statement of the aims and objectives of the club and its staff.

The implementation document will discuss maintenance or reconstruction programmes designed to implement the policy earlier itemised. This will contain a number of plans for the future to include long term programme (20-30 years), a mid-term programme (10 years) and a short term five year rolling programme. This will enable the club to look at all aspects of the course including tree planting for the future and next year's maintenance programme for today. Having a five year rolling programme enables the Head Greenkeeper to use his initiative to utilise resources

efficiently and still work within an agreed long term programme.

It is surprising that the most important role of any management committee, that of forming a policy, has been often neglected within the golf club. However, it is very pleasing to see that a number of clubs are seriously addressing the problem and are developing policies to deal with the future. The English Golf Union has been undertaking a number of workshops on policy documents to show good practice to all member clubs.

The Employer

The role of the employer is usually delegated to the Green Committee when it comes to the greenkeepers. As an employer the Green Committee will have a number of legal obligations including making sure the green staff are abiding by the law when handling chemicals and working with machines. In addition, the Green Committee will need to monitor standards on the course. Clearly the standard and rate of work is very important and this can often be an issue when new demands are being made on green staff due to the increased demand for quality and excellence. Often the greenkeepers do not have the resources in materials and machines necessary to achieve those standards seen on the televised competition courses. While the Head Greenkeeper is generally in charge of hiring and firing it is the Green Committee's ultimate responsibility to hire and fire staff including the Head Greenkeeper. Similarly, while the Head Greenkeeper should deal with minor aspects of staff discipline, the ultimate sanction will be an interview with the Chairman of the Green Committee and written warnings from him.

Along with hiring staff comes the requirement to determine pay and conditions of service. These will vary from club to club although BIGGA has suggested rates of pay and conditions of service for greenkeepers in the UK. With greenkeepers becoming more professional, the general standard of golf courses is improving with higher rates of pay and better conditions in which to work. It is now common for greenkeepers to be allowed to go for training/education to colleges to

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gain and improve their knowledge of greenkeeping. For Head Greenkeepers additional training will be required with regard to supervision of men and management of resources.

The working conditions of greenkeepers are also beginning to improve. The days when greenkeepers were found in decaying sheds hidden behind trees without electricity or water are hopefully fast fading. It is now very important that, to gain the high quality of staff required, facilities should be suitable for the 1990s. This will include providing a clean mess room with cooking facilities, adequate toilets and shower facilities, the correct machines for the job and adequate workshops and sheds in which to maintain and keep the machines. Clearly, to have the best men you must provide good facilities. Good greenkeepers do not wish to work in 19th century conditions, nor should they have to.

Liaison with the Membership

As an elected body, the Green Committee needs to liaise regularly with the membership.

This can, of course, be done in many ways, informal as well as formal. The formal channel of communication will be through the regular main Committee or Council meeting held perhaps monthly throughout the year.

In addition, there are many informal ways when the Green Committee can inform the membership of what is happening on the course and gain reaction from them. This includes general socialising at the bar and club social events as well as when playing competitions. It is also very important that the greenkeepers be encouraged to be friendly and informative on the course when meeting members. Clearly this does not mean them stopping work every five minutes to have a chat, but does mean some form of informal and friendly communication when appropriate.

Other common means of liaising with the membership include having a suggestion box and putting items of importance upon the notice board. Often, though, suggestion boxes can be mis-used with members putting in critical comments without wishing to add their name. Any suggestion or comment made by a member who is not willing to put his or her name to it should, in my opinion, be thrown in the bin immediately.

Notice boards are sometimes a point of consternation as many people consider that the best way to keep a secret is to write a notice and pin it to the notice board. However, the notice board is in part a place where the agreed policy document and monthly work plan could be pinned to enable members to see up and coming work programmes. Major renovation works can be notified to the membership on the board to prevent disappointment or upset at the time of the work being done. In addition, clear liaison with the Secretary and Competition Secretary is essential so that the major work is not undertaken at times of major events. The Head Greenkeeper has a very clear role here in making sure that the course work runs smoothly with the running of competitions and playing of golf on the course.

Expenditure on the Course.

The standard to which the course is maintained is far the club to decide. While many Head Greenkeepers see themselves as the defenders of standards on the course this is, in reality, a false assumption. There can be no doubt that it is for the members to decide the standard of maintenance they require. It is, however, the role of the Head Greenkeeper to

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let the membership be aware of the standards that can be achieved if the resources are available. It is very easy for the Head Greenkeeper to box himself into a corner by setting standards far higher than the club can resource. This leads him to undertake excessive overtime in an attempt to maintain the standards he would like to see on the course. If this continues, then the Head Greenkeeper can be frustrated and disillusioned as he tried to achieve the impossible. Having said that most clubs are trying to strive for standards higher than in the past. Clearly this requires additional resources than those provided in the past. Resources include the number and quality of staff, the budget available for maintenance, the general machinery budget for repair or procurement of new machinery and general funding for sundries on the course. It is the job of the Green Committee to determine expenditure and put forward a budget to the main Committee or Council. Ideally, this budget should be drawn up by the Head Greenkeeper and discussed with the Green Committee prior to submission. The Head Greenkeeper is the professional who does know the requirements for the standard set. In addition to the annual maintenance budget there may be a requirement for additional

reconstruction on the course. Commonly many clubs are rebuilding and enlarging tees, rebuilding defunct soil based greens, improving pathways and rebuilding bunkers. Such new construction needs to be planned years in advance so it can be adequate resource.

It should be noted that some clubs see the control of the budget as one of limiting expenditure and not controlling expenditure. While these two are often taken as one, they are completely different. It may be that the club will need to increase expenditure to maximise its resources and achieved the desired standards. A large initial capital outlay to purchase new machinery might enable the course to be run more efficiently. This could have two benefits, either additional part time summer labour that is normally taken need not be employed, or that labour can be redeployed to increase and improve course presentation.

Conclusion

The role of the Green Committee is therefore diverse and wide. It is not in any way a surro-

gate Head Greenkeeper and should leave the professionals to do the job that they are employed to do. Fundamentally, the role is one of initially determining policy and then seeing that policy implemented by liaising with the Head Greenkeeper on a regular basis. To enable that policy to be implemented will require regular liaison with the membership to ensure that continued support and funds are available to undertake the necessary work.

The secret of success is to develop what might be called the "Green Team", a true liaison and rapport between the Green Committee and the Head Greenkeeper and his staff. The Green Committee needs to support, facilitate and communicate regularly with the green staff if both parties are to be successful.

Whatever members might think, there is one thing that the Green Committee and green staff both want ardently and that is to provide the best golfing facilities for the membership. Once again three cheers for the Green Committee member for there can be few other club members whose handicap increases the more time they spend at the course.

■ John Hacker is senior agronomist with PSD Agronomy.

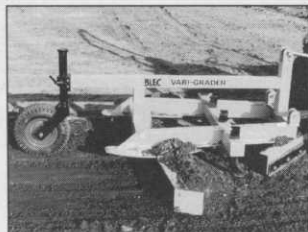
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