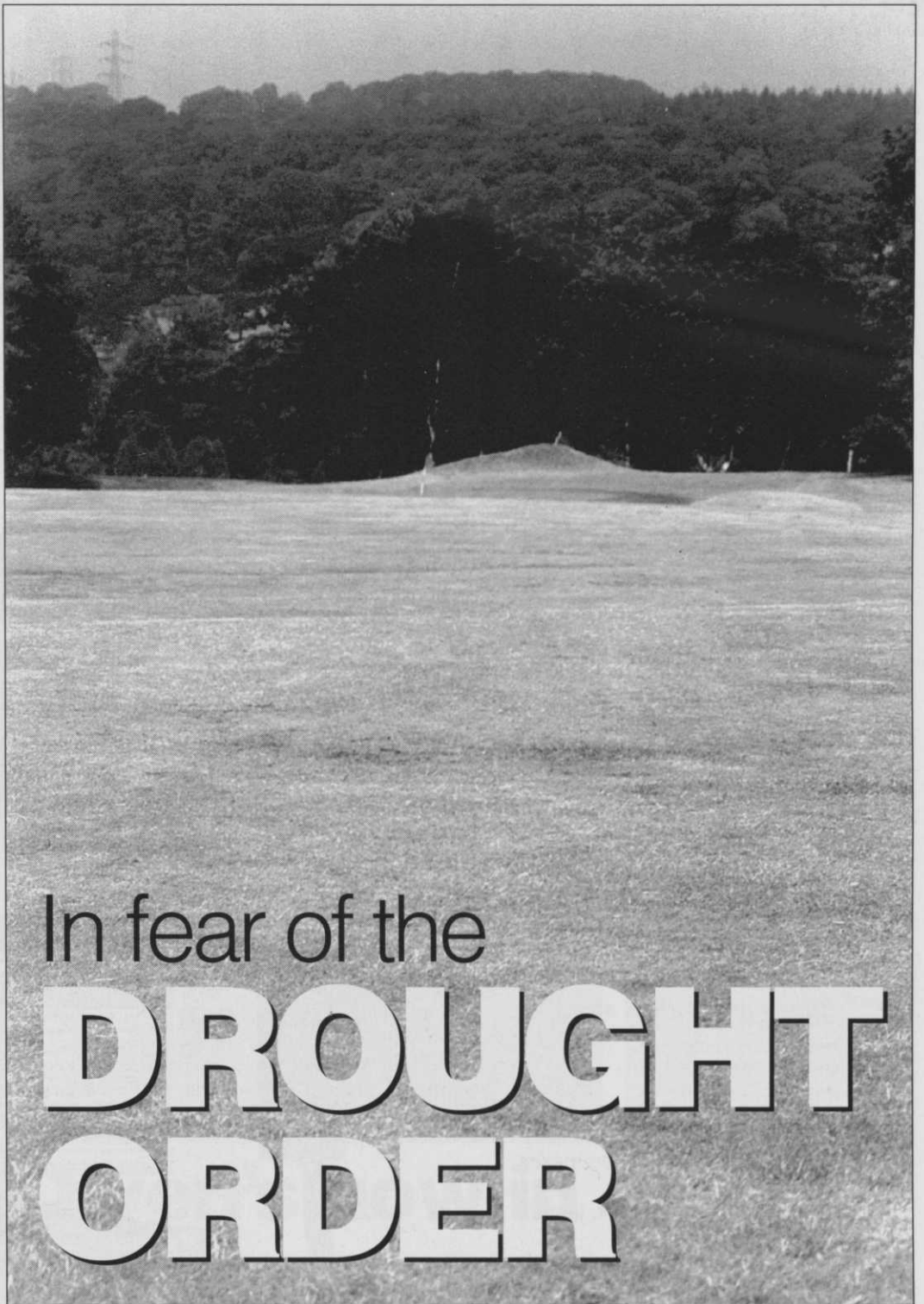


NEWS

SPECIAL REPORT



In fear of the DROUGHT ORDER

The driest summer since records began in 1727 has seen golf courses, many already suffering hosepipe bans, bracing themselves for the potentially catastrophic impact of Drought Orders.

With normally lush courses turning yellower by the day and many already surviving on rationed water supplies the probability of a total ban by Drought Order on "non essential use" – which includes golf clubs – could see courses close and/or their greens being lost to the drought.

A spokesman for Yorkshire Water, one of the first companies to seek an Order, said that there would need to be a "significant amount" of rainfall before the need for the Order could be removed.

"Because of the British climate we work to fairly wide parameters but we are getting near to the edge at the moment. We have hit a level of water stocks we would not expect to hit until much later in the summer," explained the spokesman.

Yorkshire as a whole is perhaps the worst hit area in the country with 40% of expected rainfall over the last four months and West Yorkshire the worst in in Yorkshire with only 20% of expected rainfall between April and July.

Graham Hollingworth, Head Greenkeeper of Horsforth GC in Leeds, said that if the Drought Order came into effect it would be a disaster.

"We would have to close the course or at the very least move to temporary greens. As a greenkeeper I would prefer to close the course because even now there is damage done on the fairways.

"I was here in 1976 and it was bad then but this is as bad as it could get."

Ron Bramley, Secretary of Fulford GC in York, said that they had the benefit of a borehole from which they are allowed to take a million gallons between March and September with the authorisation of the water authorities.

Pat Murphy, Head Greenkeeper at usually lush Shipley GC, said that the streams which came

down from the hills beside the course had totally dried up.

"We would normally cut our fairways three times a week but I can't remember the last time we did them," he explained.

Christopher Hodge, Secretary of Keighley GC, said that they had been taking water out of a local river but that the National River Authority was often stopping them. "I call them every day and if the level is 30 millimetres below a certain mark we are not allowed to take. If we are stopped we are currently allowed to use the domestic supply but that will stop if the Drought Order comes.

"We are letting our greens grow longer sometimes going

from Tuesday to Saturday without cutting them. We are just keeping them alive watering them five minutes every evening. but if the Drought Order comes into effect we will just lose the greens. We can't really move to temporaries as our fairways are also so bad."

Clubs which had invested in tree planting projects in recent months were seeing many young trees die off before having a chance to establish themselves.

One potential solution to the threat of losing greens comes from South African-born agronomist Gordon Jaaback who has experience of working in arid conditions.

"I would suggest a light covering of straw over the greens pinned down with a net. This lets the light through and holds in the moisture, stopping evaporation," explained Gordon, who has also written a water management article on Page 15 in this issue.

"It must be wheat, not grass, straw and I would say that you would need two or three bales per green.

"Obviously while the greens are covered up you could still play off temporaries," he explained.

As *Greenkeeper International* went to press, and with the dry spell expected to continue, more water companies were seeking Drought Orders.