

In a follow up to last month's article in *Greenkeeper International* on the the Valderrama Declaration and the Committed to Green Foundation, Scott MacCallum travelled to Dorking to meet David Stubbs, and discuss the issues surrounding Committed to Green...

THE DAVID STUBBS INTERVIEW

Green ISSUES

Greenkeeper International: Can you tell me about the Committed to Green Foundation and why the decision was taken to move on from the European Golf Association Ecology Unit?

David Stubbs: I see the new Foundation as a seamless progression from the original Ecology Unit, which had been going for the last six years. It started as an in-house environmental advisory unit within the European Golf Association, essentially to help the golf authorities gain a proper understanding of environmental issues and how best to deal with the green lobby. We first developed An Environmental Strategy for Golf in Europe (published 1995), and this led on to a pilot project on a sample of courses from all over Europe, with a view to setting up an Environmental Management Programme for golf.

Early on we received vital support from the European Commission, which enabled us to take the programme forward and establish what is now known as Committed to Green. In the course of time, it was felt by our main funding partners - the R&A, European Tour and EGA - that the best way forward for Committed to Green would be on an independent basis. A key concern is credibility. If golf is to gain public acceptance as an environmentally friendly activity, we need a clear, credible system to demonstrate what is being achieved. An in-house green label would not make sense.

The new Committed to Green Foundation will, therefore, be an independent, not-for-profit trust, based in the UK but with a pan-European remit. We are in contact with the

Charity Commission to try to obtain Charitable Status. Although our environmental and educational goals are generally accepted as charitable, to confine our activities purely to golf courses would not be. A charity has to offer general benefit to the public as a whole, and golf is too narrow a field.

As it happens, over the last few years there has been an increasing debate within other sports about environmental issues. In some circles there is talk of a European green label for sport. Given all we have already done in golf, I think it is essential that we are active players in this growing debate. It will give our Foundation the necessary wider scope, and for golf it should ensure that the game remains at the forefront of future developments in this field.

GI: Within the Foundation are there mechanisms for consultation with people who are working within the industry like greenkeepers?

DS: The Foundation is run by an independent Board of Trustees. We certainly plan to set up some form of consultative forum, whereby interested parties - funding bodies, industry organisations, environmental groups, etc - come together to discuss current issues, to help us develop our strategy and action programme. I see this as an advisory commission, but very important in guiding our work. It should certainly include greenkeeping representation.

We also have a Technical Working Group to discuss the nuts and bolts of the Committed to Green programme. This started under the Ecology Unit and is basically for the National Ecology Officers who are employed by

their respective national golf federations. These are not strictly ecologists, some are, but others come from more agronomic backgrounds, and some are in fact ex-greenkeepers. Their role is to develop golf-environment projects in their country and this means regular contact with greenkeepers on the courses they visit. Our group meetings usually involve the greenkeeper from our host site.

GI: It doesn't sound as though there any formal arrangements for anyone from the greenkeeping profession to contribute to those meetings?

DS: That is fair comment. My feeling is that through the original pilot projects, the continual work of the National Ecology Officers and liaison with clubs already signing up to Committed to Green, we have had considerable input from the greenkeeping profession. There is no way anyone can say we have ignored greenkeepers, but I do accept that this has not been apparent at a formal association level and I suppose that is where the problem is perceived.

One important principle I am keen to maintain is that all formal contact between the Committed to Green Foundation and the greenkeeping profession should be via FEGGA. We are a European programme and we need to be able to communicate with greenkeepers at that level. When FEGGA delegates come to our meetings - such as the recent Valderrama Summit - they are representing all 22 national greenkeeper associations, including BIGGA. We are doing exactly the same with the golf architects.

In future, therefore, we will certainly be happy for FEGGA to participate

What is the Valderrama Declaration?

The Valderrama Declaration reads as follows:

Golf is a game rich in tradition and heritage, which owes its origins to nature. The first golf courses were formed entirely by natural elements and the game evolved to fit what nature provided.

However, like in many other sports, the pressures of modern life have tended to move the game away from its natural origins, as courses have increasingly become concentrated near to large population centres. Moreover, the growth of the game has spread golf far beyond its original climatic region, which has led to the need to confront new challenges in the field of course design and construction, and the management of turfgrass and water resources. The television image of manicured perfection reinforces the risk of golf becoming more and more disconnected from its natural environment. This is having a fundamental effect on how the game is played and perceived.

Golf has an enormous global following. It has the capacity to motivate and inspire. At the same time, when pursued without the limitations of a guiding environmental ethic, it can impact severely on ecosystems and communities. Golf is both influenced by, and exerts an influence on, the society and the natural environment in which it takes place. By drawing on its traditions and values, golf has therefore a remarkable opportunity, and a responsibility, to play a positive role in moulding the attitudes and goals of the world in which we live and to set an example in environmental stewardship. Over recent years the golfing bodies in the USA and Europe have achieved a greater understanding of the environmental aspects of golf course construction and management. By using science as a foundation for research and education programmes in the areas of turfgrass management, sustainable development and environmental protection it has been possible to develop initiatives and partnerships for the benefit of golf, the environment and people.

These actions represent long-term commitments embodied in the philosophy of a 'Green Games' ethic: a combination of environmental stewardship, economic efficiency and social responsibility, which together form the cornerstones of the international sporting community's Agenda 21. By subscribing to this ethic, and by continuing to support the principles and practices of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and Committed to Green the golf community declares its commitment to sustainability and respect for its natural heritage.

Signed on behalf of the golf authorities by

F Morgan Taylor, President of the USGA
Peter Dawson, Secretary of the R&A
Dieter Usner, President of the EGA

Also endorsed on behalf of sport and the environmental community by

Pal Schmitt, Chairman, International Olympic Committee Sport and Environmental Commission
Claude Martin, Director General, World Wide Fund for Nature International
Jacqueline Aloisi de Larderel, Director Technology, Industry and Economics Division, United Nations Environment Programme
James Currie, Director General Environment, European Commission

actively in our Consultative Forum and Technical Working Group meetings. Meanwhile at a national level the Ecology Officers will continue to work with their national greenkeeper associations and that will give us another line of feedback.

GI: There is a feeling perhaps that BIGGA being the largest greenkeeping association and with UK viewed as the leading golf force in Europe that BIGGA should be given a slightly greater voice.

DS: BIGGA is a key member of FEGGA and has its influence through that route. I believe it is important to stick to the principle of FEGGA being our single point of contact for the entire European greenkeeping profession.

GI: From where did the initiative for Committed to Green initially come?

DS: In our early meetings with the European Commission, they mentioned the Blue Flag scheme for bathing beaches. You go to a beach, see a blue flag flying, and know it is clean and safe. They felt we could take a similar approach and develop a green flag for golf courses to prove their environmental credentials.

The Blue Flag is underpinned by the Bathing Water Directive, a simple, legal threshold for water quality. No such scheme would work for golf, so instead we took an Environmental Management System approach. You may have heard of EMAS or ISO14001, international standards for environmental management. They are primarily aimed at large enterprises and are very bureaucratic and costly. However, their basic structure and principles can readily be adapted to smaller situations. So, in effect we have shadowed EMAS, stripped it down to reflect the scale and nature of golf courses and branded it Committed to Green. In this way we have a product which addresses golf in a relevant and practical way, yet is based around the structure of an internationally recognised management system.

Our biggest problem in golf was the perception from the outside world that the game was anti-environment. Although we have made good progress in putting forward a more positive case, there are still plenty of people who think golf courses are bad for the environment. Committed to Green is therefore a tool for helping golf clubs to show that they are being responsibly managed and to gain public recognition for their environmental

achievements. It is not a question of interfering with how courses are managed. It is a voluntary programme and it is up to participating clubs to progress according to their wishes and circumstances. We want to help them gain full recognition but there is no compulsion.

I know many greenkeepers say that they are doing much of this already. That's true, but largely this is being done individually in an unstructured way. If we could bring all this together under the Committed to Green label "from all across Europe" imagine the positive effect of hundreds, even thousands, of golf clubs taking an environmental lead. It would be a huge statement by the golf community which would be immensely beneficial for the game as a whole.

GI: Do you think the public perception of golf is still negative or has this changed over the last five years?

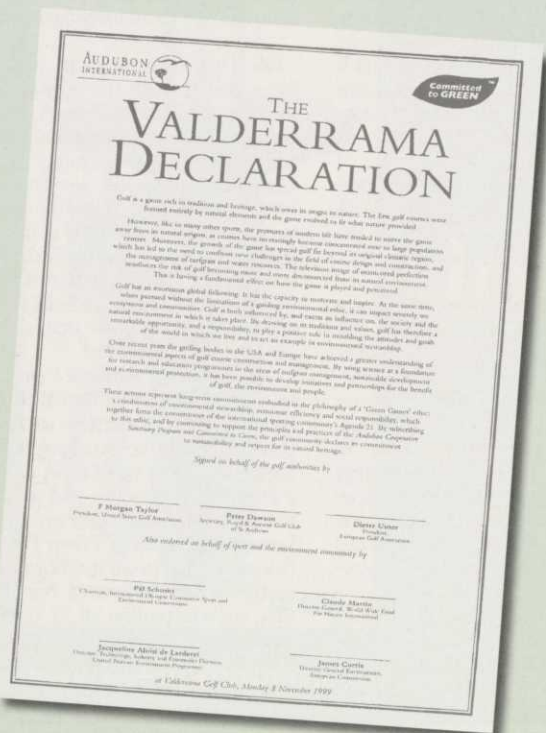
DS: It has improved but there is still a long way to go. Attitudes in the UK have always been less hostile than on the continent but we must never be complacent. To establish and maintain a positive public perception of golf is a long-term, continual task. There is still a lot of work to be done.

GI: On a practical level, on the implementation of the programme, who are you highlighting to carry out the programme for you at individual golf clubs?

DS: Committed to Green is about teamwork. I have often seen greenkeepers doing great conservation work on their course but without any support or involvement from others.

In most cases the greenkeeper will be the pivotal person in devising and implementing the programme. I certainly cannot imagine a club achieving full Committed to Green recognition without the active participation of the greenkeeper, but nor will any club achieve recognition solely on the greenkeepers' efforts. It has to involve members, other staff and perhaps even local specialists.

The starting point of Committed to Green is for a club to adopt an environmental policy statement and to create a Committed to Green Team. That will ensure broader support and legitimacy for the project. Remember, the programme is not just about conservation on the golf course. It embraces a wide range of technical aspects - obvious course related matters such as nature conservation, turf and water management, as well as



broader topics such as energy efficiency, waste management, purchasing policies and communications. These topics can relate to the club as a whole (buildings and dealings with the local community), so there has to be input from other people in the club.

GI: Do you find your enquiries come from greenkeepers who already have environmental policies of their own in operation?

DS: I quite accept that in many cases the initiative will come from greenkeepers but not exclusively so. Remember we are promoting Committed to Green across Europe and the situation varies from country to country. Sometimes the initial contact comes from a member, Chair of Green or Club Secretary, in other cases the National Ecology Officer may make a presentation to a club meeting. Whether or not the greenkeeper makes the first move, he or she is soon closely involved.

GI: I am not saying it should be greenkeeper-led but that the implication is that they can do the physical work but the thinking should be left to other people. That is perhaps why there is an element of antipathy towards the programme?

DS: I do not see Committed to Green as necessarily being greenkeeper-led. The whole concept is to involve the club as a whole - that is the only way to achieve lasting improvements. Across the different management categories I expect the bulk of the practical implementation will fall to the green staff - hence their pivotal role - but the planning and presentation of the programme should involve the whole of the Committed to Green Team. To my mind that is a way forward for greenkeepers to have their work better appreciated and understood. I have not sensed any antipathy among the greenkeepers I have met but certainly we need to listen to any concerns from the profession generally.

GI: What has been the response since you were launched? How many clubs have registered within the UK?

DS: It is still early days but I think there has been a good reaction from the golf community. As the former Ecology Unit, we have not strenuously promoted Committed to Green, preferring to leave this to the National Ecology Officers, who can then provide good back up. That means the main response so far has been on the

Continent. In countries like England and Wales, where there is not yet an Ecology Officer, interested clubs have been contacting direct to my office, or via Bob Taylor at the STRI.

GI: How does the Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Charter fit into Committed to Green?

DS: Committed to Green is a flexible structure, able to accommodate different national approaches. We have a common entry point (i.e. registration) and everyone eventually works towards a common goal (i.e. full recognition at European level). How they get there will depend greatly on the focus and support provided at national level. In this respect the Scottish Charter fits perfectly into the system.

GI: In effect the Scottish Charter would be seen as an "O" level as opposed to the "A" level that is final Committed to Green status?

DS: The Charter is an important, integral part of the Scottish programme and confers valuable status on those who have been awarded it. The focus is more particularly on wildlife and natural heritage aspects whereas the full Committed to Green programme is meant to be a fully integrated plan including aspects like communication, education waste management and energy efficiency. In this way the Charter is an essential intermediate step in the procession along the Committed to Green path for Scottish clubs that choose to go this route.

GI: There is a concern it is the elite end of the market and that it is the big name golf clubs that have been signed up for it. Is the programme elitist?

DS: I'd reject that totally. The whole aim is to ensure that it is suitable to any club, any time, anywhere.

GI: The clubs you do hear about are Valderrama, Loch Lomond and The Belfry.

DS: We have over 20 clubs in Belgium, the same again in Austria and a whole pile in Finland all setting about their environmental programme. I bet you won't have heard of most of them! Here in England we have clubs like Temple (which everyone has heard about I guess) as well as Blundell's Hill, the Phoenix Club near Rotherham, Burnham Beeches, Merrist

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Wood and many more. So, no way is there a preponderance of big name clubs. In Scotland, clubs like Linlithgow and Kilmacoll are very much at the forefront of the initiative.

On the other hand, it is important to have the tournament venues like Valderrama and The Belfry involved. They are in the public eye and they set examples to the rest of the golfing world. Indeed they should arguably be leading the way in environmental management, but you are right that we do not want any small clubs to be put off.

GI: What is the cost of getting enrolled?

DS: There is no enrolment charge. The real cost is mental strain in terms of getting people, the Committed to Green Team, to think about environmental matters. Any real expenditure should be for things they would have done anyway to improve the course, not simply to get a green award. I just hope that by thinking green, people will find better solutions to management problems; ones which enhance the golf playing experience, improve the environmental quality of the course and make for more efficient management.

GI: The other comment you hear is that it is held up by some organisations and individuals as a good cause and is purely in existence for reasons of political correctness.

DS: I don't think the golf authorities would have spent all this time and energy in developing Committed to Green if it was purely a PR exercise. I really don't understand such sentiments. If people truly care about golf and want to see the game continue to develop, they must recognise that environmental concerns have to be addressed in a proper, professional way.

We are also getting significant recognition from respected environmental groups and individuals: such as WWF and Jonathon Porritt. They are not going to stand by and let golf get away with lip service, so we have to deliver.

GI: When do you think there will be a flow of clubs coming through and completing the programme?

DS: We are still working on the final recognition criteria but I hope that we can get an initial batch of fully certified clubs within the next year or so. It does take time. Bearing in mind your previous question, it would be disastrous if we rushed things through just to claim some numbers, without having everything in place. Credibility is the key: we need accepted Environmental

Performance Indicators, we need a pool of experts around Europe to help with verification, so nobody can turn round and say it is some kind of internal fix.

GI: So when do you think you'll be going around making presentations to clubs which have completed the programme?

DS: It would be nice to peg the presentations to some major event, so we get to all the golf media. We launched Committed to Green at the 1997 Ryder Cup, so maybe next year's matches at The Belfry would be a good target.

GI: What was the purpose of the Valderrama Summit?

DS: This needs explaining because I think there has been a few misunderstandings about the Summit.

The Valderrama Summit was primarily a joint meeting between the USGA Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee and National Ecology Officers and researchers from Europe. It was to review research findings from the last decade and to discuss mechanisms for their practical application.

We then found we had the opportunity to invite top officials from the golf authorities and leading environmental organisations. In the end we had the Director Generals of the World Wide Fund for Nature International and the European Commission Environment Directorate, on the same platform as the Presidents of the USGA and EGA and the Secretary of the R&A. This does not happen every day and was a unique chance to get them to agree a joint statement on common principles and goals relating to golf and the environment - hence the Valderrama Declaration.

Given how only a few years ago WWF was so sceptical about golf, I feel this was a fantastic achievement and an exciting development. It is one which the golf industry as a whole should be supporting.

GI: The fact that it was initially a USGA committee meeting perhaps answers the comment about there being an American bias.

DS: There was no American bias. Those comments in last month's Greenkeeper International were ridiculous - they were inaccurate and offensive. The Summit had a well balanced programme focusing on issues, not a comparison between countries. Technical research has been predominantly American - that is a fact - so there was more emphasis on American

research but when it came to practical matters like nature conservation and Committed to Green, then there was ample input from European participants.

GI: Although there was an under representation of European greenkeeping?

DS: There were two FEGGA delegates there out of a total of about 35 Europeans. Indeed we had bent over backwards to make sure the greenkeepers were represented, so I am disappointed to hear such comments.

GI: How do you greet the news that member Associations of FEGGA have agreed that the programme can't be supported?

DS: I was very surprised and I certainly had no inkling of it. What we had asked for was an endorsement of the Valderrama Declaration; something we are putting to other golf organisations such as the PGAs and golf architects. Indeed we have received a very warm letter of support from the GCSAA.

The Valderrama Declaration is about traditional values of golf and good environmental practice. There is nothing here which can conceivably be antagonistic to greenkeepers. The invitation is still open to FEGGA to come on board, support Committed to Green and to work with us. I accept we can improve the communications there but it is a two way flow.

GI: What are your views on BIGGA's own Golf Environment Competition?

DS: I think it is a great initiative. At first I was concerned that the competition format creates a winner, while the efforts of all the others is unrewarded, which could be discouraging. However, the competition has progressed over the years and it is now a widely known entity. Indeed it could be an excellent feeder into Committed to Green. That would be a great opportunity for BIGGA to help our programme. All those entrants who do not gain an award could still be encouraged to take their environmental work forward through Committed to Green.

GI: Any other comments you'd like to make?

DS: Just to say I think we are all working towards common goals, and despite recent difficulties, I very much hope that the greenkeeping profession will get behind Committed to Green, so we can work together.