

The Committed to Green debate gathers momentum with Joe Bedford, Vice Chairman, and Dean Cleaver, Secretary, of the Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers Associations taking heed from Old Tom Morris

Lessons learned

The question is, did the funding bodies, representative Associations and authorities even look back to see when all programmes were collated if they would work? The answer is NO.

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On course for change a conference by the Royal & Ancient Golf Course Advisory Panel brought both of us to the hallowed ground of St. Andrews, the spiritual home of golf, and a fitting and inspirational place to visit at the dawn of the New Millennium to discuss our beloved game and what we now believe is required "a change of course for golf."

The cold wind of the Eden estuary swept across the old course as we entered the Royal and Ancient clubhouse. A mysterious quality filled the air as we experienced the warmth and hospitality of the reception area. The Open Championship Trophy sat in an old glass case at the entrance to the "big room" and inside the walls were covered with magnificent paintings. Moving about the room meeting the other guests you could not help being drawn to view the paintings, which depicted many scenes and landscapes. The immortal people of

golf were represented in the canvas, among them, old Tom Morris, winner of four Open Championships. A native of St. Andrews, and custodian of the links from 1864 he set about in harmony with Mother Nature and time to assist in the evolution of the Old Course. In this "big room" the changes in golf course maintenance and the essence of golf were hard to fathom. As we admired the portrait of Old Tom Morris we felt very proud of our profession for just like the great man we are the custodians of the courses of the world.

Our predecessors were confronted with many challenges in being the guardians of golf courses and now in our time, we face the question about the role of golf and its place in a modern environment. Who has issue with golf? Is it the European Union, our National Governments, environmental or interest groups, maybe the public? Some people site extremist groups

with unrealistic objectives, Whoever they maybe golf has responded in different ways.

Golf's authoritative bodies, the Royal and Ancient and the PGA European Tour through the European Golf Association, formed the Ecology Unit which in turn planned a very laudable environmental programme, 'Committed to Green.' National greenkeeping associations recognised also their responsibility and implemented specific programmes of education, set up discussion groups and in some cases run excellent Environmental Awards. The Federation of European Golf Greenkeeping Associations, an umbrella group of the nineteen European greenkeeping associations, was set up to meet and share common bonds and interests on education, professional recognition and most importantly environmental issues, on a European level. The lack of adequate communication between

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the golfing authorities, ecology unit, greenkeeping associations and others led to different paths being taken. Visions, strategies and plans were drawn with buzzwords like sustainable, biodiversity and stewardship being flaunted. The question is, did the funding bodies, representative Associations and authorities even look back to see when all programmes were collated would they work? The answer is NO. There is no better medium to firmly indicate this than the meeting of FEGGA's nineteen member Associations which took place in Spain back in November 1999. A clear mandate was given to the board of FEGGA, to ensure primary participation for our profession in any specific environmental plan for golf courses, and that is what we intend to do.

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Following our clear mandate we would like to make the following recommendations to the various parties concerned.

Funding Bodies:

The Royal and Ancient, The PGA European Tour and the European Golf Association.

- Invite submissions from all professional representative organisations within the golf industry on present and future ideals.

- Set out from the funding policies 'golf-only' environmental programmes and ensure guidance and control.

- Organise a consistent lobby at European Union, national and local level of the environmental benefits of golf courses. This is correctly reflected in legislation.

- Ensure adequate funding. This issue is the greatest challenge to ever face golf.

Committed to Green Foundation:

- Return to golf ecology only, the idea of encompassing other sports is wrong, Golf individuality will be weakened at a vital time when we are coming to terms with this challenge. We do not want to be associated with motorbike organisations.

- Shift the emphasis of the programme to the golf course. Land usage is the primary issue, buildings like clubhouses and hotels are already regulated with waste management and energy efficiency policies.

- Implement from the findings and recommendations of the funding bodies any necessary re-structuring.

- Ensure that any programme implemented is practical with a minimum use of jargon. It must be freely available with self-help in principle to ensure cost does not prohibit participation.

- Promote the benefits of golf course turf.

- Ensure the programme reaches to young golfers and children, they are the players of the future.

Greenkeeping and representative organisations:

- We all must be pro-active and put our strength behind a quality environmental programme.

- Through the associations worldwide we have the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge to provide counsel and independent information to sustain any programme.

- Hold regular meetings between architects, constructors, consultants, and trade companies to ensure coherence.

- At our golf clubs and in our communities we must spread the environmental message and the vital role that golf plays.

- Our golfers must be informed so they fully understand future implications for the game.

The game of golf is as diverse as life itself. We live in this "everything now" society and it is no different for golfers who fuel the desire for immediate and perfect conditioning of our golf courses. How can we teach everyone that a bit of Mother Nature, good environmental practice and above all patience and time are the keys to the future of golf courses?

Look no further than Old Tom Morris, custodian of the links and be inspired to do right.