

## Education is the key

Ian Tomlinson's excellent article in the January issue of *Greenkeeper International* was a breath of fresh air for those of us who believe in traditional greenkeeping, and should be a warning for those who rely on the combination of fertilisers and chemicals. Working abroad where pesticides have been banned and fertiliser use is being closely monitored would surely change the approach of many greenkeepers, and I firmly believe no matter what our suppliers tell us it is only a matter of time before we will be in the same position.

Ian describes in detail the causes of his Poa dominated greens and their subsequent failure. Excessive use of fertiliser and water combined with a minimal aeration programme is a recipe for disaster and Poa domination as well as a soaring chemical bill. It is surely time for us all to embrace these traditional principles he talks about and take a more cultural and environmentally friendly approach to greenkeeping. These principles are by no means new and have been the ones that Jim Arthur has long advocated. One of the most important factors, if we are to embark on such a radical change in policy and management, is the support of our members. Education is the key! We need strong leadership to form a nationwide education programme to make members understand that the 'green' courses they see every week on satellite television are neither the way forward or possible on our limited budgets and that a radical review is needed. This education programme must be carefully designed to promote the qualities of traditional British golf courses both from a playing and environmental perspective.

More importantly, it must be drawn up and presented from either the Home Unions or the R&A as they invariably have more respect among members than our Association. So let Ian's article be a catalyst for us as an Association and an industry to take a long hard look at the way we manage our golf courses and to put pressure on those governing bodies to help us educate our members on why there is a need for change.

A. McCombie, Parkstone Golf Club

## Northern Seminar thanks from Longhirst

Just a small note to say thank you to Doug Bell and Bert Cross for bringing the recent Northern Seminar to Longhirst Hall GC. The speakers were entertaining and very informative. A thank you must also go to the 25 or so greenkeepers who travelled on a particularly cold and frosty day. It just goes to show the club members that greenkeepers do actually think of educating themselves! Looking forward to hosting next year's autumn competition. Regards,

Graham Chambers, Course Manager, Longhirst Hall, Northumberland

# A Golf Club Manager's view

Prior to becoming a Golf Club Manager I spent 20 years as an electronics engineer. When I became a manager in this environment I was aware of the skill sets of my key managers and employees. It was not my job to manage their areas rather to make sure that they did it right and that they had everything that they needed to do it.

When I came in to golf, the one area where I had no skills was greenkeeping so I filled this gap by attending courses run by BIGGA and STRI. The information gained has been supplemented by becoming an Associate Member of BIGGA and actually reading *Greenkeeper International*. I also spend time talking to my greenstaff and learning from them. I am now in a position that I can discuss and question matters intelligently with my Head Greenkeeper and communicate information in detail to the membership (which hopefully they pass on to other members!).

I have worked with Head Greenkeepers from both ends of the spectrum: A young man who was happy to formulate our greens management policy with me and then to discuss greenkeeping matters with the members and the other who was probably capable of doing this but accepted that he was going to be told what to do by the committee and therefore sat back and accepted it and made no decisions of his own.

I expect my Head Greenkeeper to

come to me and tell me what we should be doing, be prepared to discuss the line he is taking and why he has eliminated other options, then get on with it and that is why he is being paid the salary commensurate with the job.

More and more golf clubs are changing their management structures to have small management committees. Because golf clubs have become businesses, the amount of legislation has escalated dramatically and is specific to the environment plus there are less and less volunteers for positions on the committees because of the pressures on time of modern life. These changes mean that the staff these clubs employ have an increasing self determination of their role as they become solely responsible, through higher management, for their department. 'Course Development' documents are rapidly becoming the norm as a way of eliminating the changeable nature of the Green Committee. These allow the greenkeeper to advise on the best management policy for the course and get it down in print. He can then be left to perform the job he is paid to do, with the committee/s only being involved with exceptions to the plan.

In some clubs these changes will happen slowly so the long standing Head Greenkeeper will have a chance to adapt if that is what is expected of him.

But in other clubs this will happen overnight and Head Greenkeepers should be preparing themselves for the change now! For existing Head

Greenkeepers, the majority of the change will have to be by self help, but for the staff being trained now, there should be an emphasis on applicable management techniques so that, as they become Deputy Heads and upwards, they are confident enough to be able to discuss the management of the links with senior management and not be afraid to stand their ground, backed by fact, if they feel they are correct. At the end of the day, if a company wants to go against specialist advice there is little you can do to stop them, but it is probably time to look for a new job!

The final thing that we have to remember is that WE have chosen a profession where the shareholders in the company are also the customers and can have direct daily access to the workforce which is not something that you will find in Lloyds Bank or ICI! Therefore, we have to deal with the situations that that environment brings accordingly.

Ian Tomlinson should be aware that the Secretary/General Manager is responsible for the running of the whole company and not just one part of it, therefore he should question what one of his heads of department is doing, but I wouldn't expect him to overrule that manager unless he has good reason.

As a small aside for Dave Goodridge, my 20 years engineering were spent in the RAF.

Richard Penley-Martin, Secretary, Stoneham Golf Club

# Working together for mutual benefit

I have been reading your recent correspondents' remarks with great interest and thought that I could provide some different angles.

While I agree that Course Managers must lead with authority, they will always be limited by the level of authority invested in them by their employer and can only act as they wish if appropriately empowered. It is an unfortunate fact that Greens Committees do not always have the best interests of the golf course in mind when they make important decisions.

I know of several instances where the use of temporary greens is diminishing because Captains, committees etc, are overriding Greenkeepers' decisions in order to fulfil the day's intention of playing golf. I also know of two local courses where temporary greens are not employed at all, much to the Course Manager's vexation.

Previous letters on this subject have commented on "interference from Greens Committees" so this is clearly a common problem. (For "interference" should we be reading "ill-advised decisions"?) However, the Committee is in place to serve the best wishes of the mem-

bers; and the Course Manager is employed with the same end. Regrettably for many members (including those in authority) the distinction between the short and long term health of the golf course is a difficult one to realise. Bearing these factors in mind, surely Course Managers and Club officials should be working together for the mutual benefit of both the golf course and the members? It is not unreasonable to expect partnerships of this nature to operate successfully; indeed they already do in some enlightened golf clubs. Harold Blackshaw may well stand aside to let his electrician rewire his house, but I dare say he might indicate where he wants his power points.

In my view, there is an immense task ahead: We need to educate all those people in golf clubs whose business is with the golf course itself. Due to the ephemeral nature of committees, it would surely be sensible to target all golf club members i.e. future committee members. Whether BIGGA, for all its efforts, is large enough or influential enough to tackle such a task, is a tricky question. Maybe we need to enlist the help of other golfing authorities: could the R&A

commission The Way Forward for established golf clubs: could the EGU and the LGU help us to emphasise the importance of the golf course to their members?

It is evident in Central Government that power is cyclical and perhaps the rise in the greenkeeping profession that we have witnessed over the last decades is levelling off and the golf clubs are trying to reassert authority; trying to re-establish the power they have ceded. Only when those in authority are educated, and only when golf club members realise that the whole greenkeeping ideal is asseverated for the benefit of their golf game, will Course Managers be granted the necessary freedom to conduct their business to the fullest extent of their knowledge and ability.

I must thank the Editor of this magazine for respecting my wishes for anonymity. I have no reason to hide my opinions from greenkeepers, but as I am not a Course Manager, I feel this letter may be considered inflammatory at my golf club, and I do not wish to compromise my colleagues or myself.

Name and Address supplied