

## Re: Comments on the hollow tine theory

The last two weeks of August, 28 holes to hollow tine and top dress, four greenkeepers, no big budget, a little sweat and great results. Sidney Mercer's comments on Gordon Child's article, I feel are wide of the mark. We at Taunton Vale have, over the last five years, maintained exactly as Gordon and Richard Windows suggest and for us, has proved a far superior method than the late September dates we previously used. I'm sure if we can manage to cope so can other Clubs but 'each to their own' and realise that every situation is different.

**Steve Welch**  
Course Manager  
Taunton Vale Golf Club  
Somerset

## In response...

In response to Mr Mercer's letter in the November issue of Greenkeeper International I offer the following comments.

The aim of the article was to explain a philosophy with regard to obtaining maximum results from deep aeration. In our increasingly wetter climate, the autumn months – the conventional time for such work – have become far wetter than they used to be. In order to optimize performance of deep aeration treatment we must, therefore, look to other times of the year when the soils are likely to be drier and thus more receptive to the task, both in terms of drainage improvement and surface recovery.

Such a generic philosophy may not be achievable or even required in some cases and our advice in this regard would of course be site specific and only administered after appropriate discussion with the turf manager/committee etc, following a course review. Obviously, describing every such eventuality (eg. soil type, requirement of the club etc.) in the constraints of a relatively brief article is impossible.

Finally, there is no doubt that the climate is changing. If we as an industry are to adapt to this change, which we surely must, we have to adopt the best management practices to ensure the best possible surfaces are provided for the golfers.

**Richard Windows**  
STRI

## Many Thanks

I would just like to thank all members, staff and trade personnel who have so kindly sent their best wishes to me over the last few weeks.

Unfortunately at the time of writing I am still in hospital awaiting my turn for the operation. I suppose, at least Marion knows where I am as they won't let me escape.

Meanwhile I look forward to the time I can thank you all in person, and once again enjoy your company.

**Gordon Child**  
Churston

## Jim Arthur 1

I am writing in response to the letter from Jim Arthur entitled 'How can we Progress?' published in last month's issue.

I have read this letter a number of times now and I am still searching to find the connection between Scott MacCallum's article on St Andrews Bay and the one from Neil Thomas. There cannot and is not a comparison to be made between the two, how can projects like ours be blamed for Chairmen of Green sacking perfectly competent greenkeepers. Surely this is down to educating the membership and as Derek Green said "properly defining the role of the Chairman". This is surely a more sensible line of action than blaming "the golf course down the road" because they dare to do something a little different.

I can also find no comparison to be made between a guy who has been voted onto a committee for a term of office and someone who spends \$50,000,000 of his "own" personal fortune. Which one do you think has the right to dictate how their golf course should look? Answers on a postcard to Mr J. H. Arthur, Budleigh Salterton, etc.

**Neil Ballingall**  
Golf Course Superintendent  
St Andrews Bay  
Fife

## Jim Arthur 2

It gladdens my heart to read another letter from Jim Arthur in our magazine - Greenkeeper International December issue.

I have, for more years that I care to remember, been a supporter of Jim's ideas and methods as have a lot of greenkeepers, many of who would support but not necessarily be able to carry out.

I have been a retired Course Manager now for four years but still take interest in what is happening as regards greenkeeping. Jim's letter let us all know what greenkeepers are up against in the world today.

How many golf courses today do we visit where we have an abundance of natural grasses? We see swards of thick meadow grass with pop-up heads not far away, lush wormy areas and fescue and bent swallowed up.

Like Jim I am not knocking Head Greenkeepers. This is what most have to do either directed or for a quiet life. Very few are able to do their own thing.

Jim Arthur has been a consistent help to the greenkeeping profession, never afraid to voice his opinion. This doesn't mean he's never wrong but time continuously let's us he's more right than wrong.

He has stood by his ideals throughout his life, never wavering and this is why at times he courts controversy as very often people don't like to hear the truth.

**John Nudds**  
Hunstanton  
Norfolk

P.S. What has happened to Sludgecombe Municipality? I miss its humour

LETTERS CONTINUED ON OVER THE PAGE...

### Jim Arthur 3

It is not often these days that I have the opportunity to be involved with greenkeeping or golf management related issues outside of my full time position of Regional Golf Course Superintendent and Superintendent at my own 54 hole, golf facility. However, I am currently recovering from minor surgery and find myself at home with time to respond and help Mr J. H. Arthur with his query in "How can we progress?".

Perhaps it would be easier to at first think in terms outside of golf and greenkeeping to any industry or product that has evolved & progressed through a long and successful history. We are, whether we like it or not, caught up in this all of the time, as sure as tomorrow will follow today. Think upon this, when I was a young lad I wanted to grow up and own a Ford Cortina Mark II. A great car for its day, 30 years ago, but today I transport my family around in a modern, safe, smooth, economical family-sized hatchback. Both cars, each in their own day though. If Ford still made Cortinas, no one would buy them. Commercially they have been superseded. You could go on and on, think of LPs and Compact Discs, mobile phones of 10 years ago compared to those of today, your Sinclair BBC Basic computer compared to today's latest Windows gizmo.

I now return to golf. I am a bit of a traditionalist. I would like to think I know some of golf and greenkeeping's history, and their traditional theories and practices. In fact I base most of my professional beliefs in these, but I would be an out of touch and out of work Course Manager if I did not continually learn, study, practice and monitor greenkeeping science, grasses, fertilisers, machinery, practices and, perhaps equally important, the golf market, as an industry/business and the golfer's - or can I use that word that is often forgotten by some - CUSTOMER'S expectations.

It is true that Links, Heathland or Downland golf is a fantastic and enjoyable experience, but one that the vast majority of golfers in the UK do not partake on a regular basis for reasons of location and, if truth be known, they are probably not good enough, find it too difficult, and the presentation of the course does not meet with their perception of what a golf course should perhaps look like. In the commercial world, whether an inland private or proprietary club, trying to meet the expectations of your golfing customer are fairly important. - Otherwise you go out of business!

Modern techniques, dwarf rye grasses, fertilisers, machinery etc. are tools to allow the manager of that business to strive for higher standards, improved quality, value for money for the customer, address problems of wear and playability during winter months, and contribute to the success of the business.

Take this as an example. Ask 100 golfers in December whether they want to play off a tee mat next to a tee of 300 square yards of pretty cold, poorly presented and recovering bent/fescue turf that is out of play to recover for the following season (reality may dictate that the turf is just sick poa), or actually playing off a 300 square yard grass tee of dwarf rye grass that is regularly fed, divoted, aerified still takes a mowing once a week, and does this week in, week out, throughout the year. - I know what answer you would get.

Take this further. Two courses located next to each other. One has tee mats and temporary greens in the winter, the other one has grass tees and main greens through properly applied modern management techniques. I do not need to tell you where the majority of golfers will be playing. As a side issue the owner of the course that has all the golfers, is making more money and potentially can be charging a higher rate. If it is a private club it will have many happy members that are proud of their course, club and maintenance staff.

This is the modern reality. I am sure that those behind St. Andrews Bay have done their homework and it is unfair to criticise their objectives to make money and fulfil a gap in the market with a modern style, playable golf course that offers something slightly different in an area of traditional Links courses.

It is true that some other high end "Championship" courses built in recent years have failed, but this is often down to poor market research, absurdly difficult design by a well known "Your pro that "Joe Average" just finds too hard to play. A design that is also too difficult and expensive to maintain and with grasses that are simply not tolerant of the climatic conditions or could ever cope with the amount of play needed to sustain the course as a viable business.

In summary the answer to the question of "How can we progress?" is fairly obvious. We are market led and it pains me somewhat to say that we do not as a professional body or individual greenkeepers have a modern enough understanding of our industry or business. That understanding should be complete, armed with the traditional values and practices of the past, but with the skill and professional management techniques to satisfy a modern golf industry. Perhaps we again go back to training. It pains me to say that at present we do not have enough greenkeepers with the full armoury of skills required to carry this out in the 21st Century. This may be because we have spent too much time looking back. It is perhaps also that we need to work closer with the game's other bodies to develop fully an environment that skilled greenkeepers wish to work in and receive the recognition from a more enlightened golf club operator, private club, or employer. It often disappoints me to hear what cannot be achieved on a golf course in terms of playing conditions as opposed to what can, and this often from greenkeepers. Some golfers seem to have accepted this as a norm, while some are frustrated and vent their feelings on the much-maligned Greenkeeper, who is forced to leave or is sacked. I am afraid that both parties, some greenkeepers and some golfers (club officials) are equally guilty of lack of knowledge and modern understanding.

Well after my rather long and rambling reply I am not off to bulldoze flat every Links course in the country, or over feed and water it into a stinking bog. I may just go up to work, open my locker and clean my clubs. Oh yes they are the old bladed ones I have had for nearly 20 years, with the exception of my wooden woods, with regular steel shafts. I wonder how many Greenkeeper International readers play with the latest cavity backed wonder weapons, with graphite shafts and woods that are some strange metal alloy about the size of a house brick. Perhaps that is just progress.

**Paul Copsey  
Hawley  
Kent**