



A well planned, modern maintenance department is a vital link between all members of staff. It helps foster good communication between those that use various items of equipment and, where applicable, those that maintain it

Servicing Your Facilities

James de Havilland looks at ways to save money by spending it when it comes to your workshop.

As anyone who visits golf courses up and down the UK will know, there is no such thing as a 'typical' course workshop. What is clear, however, is that an increasing number of clubs have professional workshop facilities while a significant minority still seem to muddle through. Although good service personnel will always seem to be able to deliver reliable equipment servicing despite their working environment, those with the best facilities have a head start.

It is easy to spend others money when writing an article, suggesting that the only way to service modern mowers and related course maintenance equipment is to carry the work out in a well lit and heated workshop. The reality is that some clubs still expect staff do some demanding repair and maintenance tasks when working out of a lean-to with a mud floor. In many cases, the kit being looked after may also be well past its first flush of youth. This is just the sort of kit that needs a great deal of TLC and a decent place to work on it.

What is often overlooked is that modern working practices will soon make it difficult to recruit good workshop qualified staff to a club offering poor facilities. A good workshop, well stocked with tools, spares and an office in which to handle the paperwork is taken for granted at some clubs. But those without such facilities may find it tough to retain any in-house maintenance ability when the current generation retire.

So, is the central argument of this article that courses with good facilities can rest on their laurels while those without should throw in the towel and have all major servicing done by third parties? Emphatically no. What we all need to be aware of is the need to keep up investment in servicing facilities. An ongoing programme to develop workshop facilities is an investment.

PLANNING FOR EXPANSION

It is tough and expensive to get planning permission these days, this hurdle often leading to problems when trying to modernise workshops. Clubs that have adapted old, and on occasion listed buildings, to house workshops and related equipment face an even bigger hurdle. However, the problems of getting improvements made are all too easy to use as a reason for not doing anything.

Again, it is easy to make suggestions. A new, single span building could well be used to re-house everything under one roof, modern industrial units providing relatively economical accommodation that has the flexibility to provide rest rooms, offices and workshops all under one roof.

This assumes there are the funds, space and, of equal importance, planning consent that would allow a new unit to be erected in a suitable position. This is simply not an option for everyone and can, in part, explain why some clubs appear to be muddling along. It is not for the want of trying.

In these cases, it takes a degree of lateral thinking to come up with a solution. Is it possible to relocate the workshops and greenkeepers buildings off site? Are any other existing buildings suitable for economic conversion? Can workshop, equipment storage, office and rest facilities be divided to fit in different locations? Can workshop facilities be shared with a third party to reduce costs? Does a local third party have workshop space that can be rented?

In some areas it may be possible to share a workshop with a local farmer or haulier. This is not as daft as it may at first appear, particularly if tools and other resources can be shared and there is good access to the course. Similarly, it could be possible to share resources by relocating a neighbouring workshop to a position on the course boundary. Farmers are currently being encouraged to diversify, so those with farming neighbours may find this option worth a look.



It may well take time to recoup the cost of a washing water recycling plant, but such a system demonstrates environmental awareness. This can help when it comes to negotiating irrigation water supplies, particularly in a dry year



Modern vehicle lifts come in a wide range of capacities. Selecting the right design calls for a degree of forward thinking, but it always pays to have a degree of over capacity. Some lifts are more versatile than others



In-house cylinder grinding facilities are not unusual these days, but investing in sets of spare cutting units that are all set and ready to go remains less common. Money spent on good machinery support is never wasted



Modern equipment does not come cheap, nor does its care and maintenance. Facilities that allow stored items to be parked up clean and dry will help control these costs, as well as make maintenance less time consuming

EXISTING FACILITIES

Assuming existing facilities are up to a good standard, it is important to keep them up to date. Modern buildings need to be maintained and kept clean if they are to look good, so it pays to put some money in the budget to allow for this. Similarly it is often the case that the buildings are finished but their surroundings are then overlooked.

Again, a budget to tidy the area around workshops and greenkeeper's 'sheds' can really improve how these facilities blend into their setting and with it the course as a whole. Good staff will always be attracted to a club that demonstrates as much care for its working environment as it does for its tees, greens and fairways.

WINTER SERVICING

So, what has all this got to do with winter servicing? As it happens, a great deal. We have been blessed, in recent years, with relatively mild winters, even in the north of Scotland. It will not be like this forever, and only those clubs with workshops that allow staff to service kit in a good workshop will see the job carried out to a reliable standard year in and year out.

Even in a typical mild southern British winter, where year round play is the norm, clean and dry workshops enable kit to be worked upon more easily. Modern mowers look after the comfort of the operator. Quite right too. It follows that those who look after those same machines should be able to do so in relative comfort as well. Regardless of the weather.

With thanks to Duncan Kelso, of Kings Hill Golf Club, West Malling, Kent for the pictures of the club's workshop facilities.