



# INFORMATION IS POWER

*Scott MacCallum learns how one golf club has purchased a full course survey package and is about to reap the benefits of what it has produced*

**As the saying goes, “Information is Power”. In essence it means that the more facts you have at your fingertips the more chance you have to be successful. Think back to the efforts that have been made to gather information. There was that famous first census, during King Herod’s time; Britain’s first ordinance survey map was published in 1801; every 10 years or so we are asked to complete a Government census, while Googleearth.com succeeded in the small task of producing a 3D map of the entire globe. The more information that people gather the more they can achieve.**

It is precisely this philosophy, which has encouraged more and more golf clubs to have their courses professionally surveyed.

There are several types of surveys. There is the below ground variety which highlight soil structure and help to uncover drains long left undiscovered when the first course plans have been destroyed or lost. Then there is the above ground surveys which can help, as talked about in last month’s magazine, routing buggy tracks around courses and ensure slopes are not excessively steep.

These surveys are much more like your traditional ordinance survey map, although some can be virtually three dimensional, and allow accurate planning on course and course management issues to be carried out.

Like many things in life, though, you get what you pay for. A quality survey costs money and nowadays more than ever golf clubs must make its hard earned finances work as hard as is possible.

With that in mind any alternative benefits that can be generated from the initial survey could help to offset the cost would be hugely welcome.

Longniddry Golf Club, near Edinburgh, has recently had its course surveyed by Optimize Golf, and are just beginning to appreciate what it will do for them.

“It is early days for us, as we only took delivery of the full system in March,” explained Longniddry Secretary, Bob Gunning.

“We bought the survey for the course management system which came

with it and we looked at the commercial benefits as the icing on the cake,” he explained.

Those commercial benefits include course planners, pin placement cards, and web tours of the course. There is also the ability for a player to have his round and score marked out on an overhead picture of the golf course – great for a tournament winning, or course record score but perhaps not so desirable for your regular higher handicapper’s efforts!

“What it does give us is a much more professional look which is invaluable when it comes to marketing the golf course,” said Bob, adding that having the survey put Longniddry in the same bracket as Carnoustie and Muirfield who have also been surveyed by the same company.

As a members’ club Bob found that members who had paid for the survey through their membership subscriptions were reluctant to pay again for course guides, pin location cards and the hand held distance devices which can be rented or bought.

“As is probably common, members of golf clubs feel they pay enough for their golf and don’t like paying for anything else so I didn’t hold out much hope for them paying for the additional benefits and that is certainly how it has turned out so far.”

However, visitors are a different category and although the season is still to start in earnest Bob was confident that the club’s healthy visitor market will respond to the sale of the course guides in the pro shop.

“What we’d like to do is ultimately build the cost of the course planner and the pin position cards into the green fee and then give visitors a welcome pack when they arrive containing a course planner and pin card.”

He reiterated, however, that any additional business generated was purely bonus and that the main reason for going ahead with the survey was the benefit it brought to Head Greenkeeper, Philip Holmes, and the management of the golf course.

“I’m someone who likes things to be under control and to have things recorded properly and systematically. That’s what appealed to me about



the system we bought. I saw the commercial benefits as a way of off-setting the investment. The question is, 'Would you spend the money just to have the survey done?' and the answer would be yes because over time it would enable us to make savings on the golf course. Philip will be able to use the benefits it brings to his and our advantage."

Since the survey, and the arrival of the accompanying software and laptop, Philip has been getting to grips with what it will be able to do for him.

"It is great to know the exact sizes of greens and bunkers etc so I can work out how much I need to order when it comes to applications, gravel and sand etc. Rather than ordering enough for a hectare, for example, I can order 1.2 hectares worth or 0.9 hectares worth. It will mean in the long term I can be much more accurate when it comes to purchasing and there should be less wastage," said Philip. "It will also help when it comes to calculating the time required to do various jobs."

The surveying of the course was done remarkable quickly to the extent that Bob Gunning didn't even see anyone on site. "They first over flew the golf course then there were people here for no more than two or three hours. I didn't even see them," said Bob.

"They overlay the photograph they have taken from the air with the survey work they do on the ground. That's the clever bit," said Bob, adding that the fly through of all 18 holes will soon be available to view on the club's website.

"I'm hoping that what we have got here at Longniddry really sets us apart from the rest and will encourage more people to visit us and more people might consider becoming members."

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