

A QUIET TIME

My duties as Chairman have been a little quieter during the past few weeks, giving me some normality back in terms of day-to-day life at work and home. We have been very dry here in the south east with, in some cases, Greenkeepers under the cosh because of no rainfall and intense heat for the time of year.

At Tyrrells Wood we have had only 3mm of rain in seven weeks, coupled with temperatures that would have been more akin to the summer than the spring. As if that wasn't enough to contend with we have had winds that would have blown off even the best-glued wig. So putting all these factors together it's been another tough spring with a slow start up to active growth in our part of the world.

Now that it has finally rained, thank goodness, with more rain in a week than during the past month and a half, we're off and running, with grass popping and our course doing very well. I have to thank my staff for their continued efforts they have done a fantastic job this year and have together laid the foundation of a good summer season.

We have had our second meeting with the IOG at BIGGA HOUSE and there are a few points of interest I would like to share with you on those.

Some rumours have been bandied about with reference to any discussions we have been having with our friends at the IOG. That it's a done deal, is the first one I would like to put to rest. If that were the case why would we need to continue to meet with the IOG? Our terms of reference are quite simple. We are exploring the possible merger of both organisations to see if there are any real, and I must add, tangible benefits for the members of both.

The next point is that we are only engaged in these talks out of financial necessity. Well, you would be pretty ill informed if you were not aware of the fact that, as an Association, we have had a downturn in our cash flow because of some manufacturers pulling out of Harrogate Week



earlier this year. Your Board has to consider many things during the course of a year and, yes, where the cash will come from to deliver the services you, the members enjoy, is one of them. So the honest answer is, of course, we have to deal with the commercial realities at all times and plan a safe and secure future for our Association for the here and now and well into the future.

With that said we have been aware of these commercial changes for some time and have been managing our affairs in your best interests so, in fact, the impact in reality has been much less than was forecast this time last year. There was a much better result from a well supported and vibrant Harrogate Week this year than was budgeted for. For that, you can all be very proud because, when asked for your continued support, you attended in your droves. To those trade members who placed their trust in us, they have my heart felt thanks also. Well done to all.

So, make no mistake, we are not engaged in these talks out of fear of our financial position.

Another real point that has been raised is this one - a perceived loss of identity will follow. Well, let's be honest we're all extremely proud

to be Greenkeepers and would never ever want to diminish our identity or standing as professionals. The same, I would suggest, is true of our friends within the ranks of the IOG. You can be sure of one thing. If there was ever going to be a case that we would lose standing within our chosen industry, I'm sure we would all, me included, decide not to pursue this merger any further.

As I said, we had another meeting to develop our thoughts further, with both parties now off doing lots of homework on some of the major issues that have to be understood if a merger is to be a possibility or not.

So no deal has been done and, no, we are not in these talks because of fear. Involved in these discussions are some very proud and dedicated Greenkeepers and Groundsmen who have great wisdom and vision for the future of their chosen organisation and have their respective members interests at heart. I'm sure they will conclude an honest report for everyone to consider this autumn and allow you to determine your own future. As I asked of you all in this column previously, engage in discussion and share your views at Section, Region and Headquarters and with your Regional Administrators - I have been impressed with their grasp of grass roots opinion during my term as your Chairman.

So it's a soggy Chair signing off for now until the next time. I have enjoyed my quiet time and have managed some quality time at home with the kids. Summer, age nine, had her first trip away with the school and had a ball and I have to admit it was a lot quieter at home for a day or so, Shannon and his football team won their league while if you have any tips on how best to deal with a teenage girl of 14 going on 27, they would be much appreciated!

Billy McMillan



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