



DEDICATION'S WHAT YOU NEED

Drax Golf Club is on the up thanks to their dedicated staff. Melissa Jones reports...

It all began back in 2004, when the club, part of the Sports & Social Club in Drax, North Yorkshire, put an application into the English Golf Union for a grant.

"I'd had previous experience of applying for a grant for a rugby pitch, so when I came on board, originally as Vice Captain, I was able to help with the paperwork. They then left it to me and Denise, our Secretary, who completed the reams of paperwork it involved," explained Paul Weaver, Club Captain.

"It was the intention for internal staff to run a budget for the club to pay for the three new holes themselves," continued Paul. After doing their sums, the club realised their budget was approximately £70,000 and the estimated price for the work was nearer £400,000.

"I got on board with the sports council and persuaded them to increase the grant from £60,000 to £280,000 then £300,000. We were the first golf club, that I know of, to get a 100% grant," continued Paul.

HOW THE GRANT WORKS

If you want to apply for a grant for your golf club, you need to fill in an application form (www.englishgolfunion.org) and send it to the English

Golf Union (EGU). The EGU will then consider the application and decide if it's a worthwhile cause. If it's considered to be a worthy application, it is then forwarded to the Sports Council who allocate a percentage of money to golf.

Once the EGU and Sports Council have approved the application, it's then the golf club's job to chat with various designers to make sure the laid down criteria, such as making sure the course is suitable for the disabled and women etc, is fulfilled within the plans - It took about two years before Drax Golf Club finally got to the point where they had everything approved and met all the criteria.

The next step is informing the council and obtaining planning permission. You have to meet the council's stipulations and give residents the opportunity to object - which in Drax's case wasn't too time-consuming and didn't rouse too many problems.

CARRYING OUT THE JOB

"We were due to start work on the three new holes last year but we are about seven months behind our original programme because of the weather," said Paul.

The new holes came about when the club recognised that as a 9 hole golf course, the club was stagnant. "Membership and turnover had

started to drift off," explained Paul, last year we had 350 golf members which only allowed us to break even. The new holes will provide a new concept."

Cue Craig, Craig Lalley did his basic greenkeeper training at Drax GC, earning £40 a week. Since then he has worked at Heworth GC and most recently Rudding Park. Paul asked Craig to return to his roots at Drax GC earlier this year to implement his new found skills by taking on the role of Course Manager. Craig now manages three permanent staff and one seasonal worker at the club.

"I identified a gap in our staff. We didn't have anyone with the knowledge to bring on the new land. I realised that if we didn't complete it to EGU standards the risk would be that the quarter of a million pounds we were given could be drawn back, which would bankrupt the club. We needed someone with the experience, someone professional," explained Paul, "and Craig's enthusiasm for what could be was in line with that of the committee."

"I know the potential of Drax and I know the vast majority of membership. I feel if I can come in and slowly change the standard of the course. It will not only benefit the Sports & Social Club but the area in general," enthused Craig.

"I can really stamp my mark on Drax and raise the profile - Selby's best kept secret. With

350 members paying 250 the budget is not massive. I've got to manage the course with the little budget I've got."

TIMESCALES

Craig hopes to have the 3 new holes ready for play by Spring 2009. Since he took on the role at Drax back in September, Craig has spent 75% of his time playing catch up: "I've put a fertiliser programme in place, started tree planting, drainage and digging of the paths, but am conscious that I still have a 9 hole course to look after," said Craig.

Over the past six weeks, Craig has been doing as much physical work as he can to get the new holes to a certain standard.

"I have now got the height of cut on the greens down to a good level. With regular hand dressing and overseeding, the greens have come on a great deal in a short time, and the sward has become very dense.

"The greens are in good shape coming into the winter months, so let's hope the weather is kind and that we have a good start to the season so I can get the new holes open and make Drax some much needed income."

MEMBERSHIP

The average age of members at Drax Golf Club is quite high and Paul believes this is because people hold the preconception that a 9 hole golf course doesn't provide enough of a challenge, as the yardage isn't as long as that of an 18.

"The course does provide a challenge for members. We need to ensure we keep all ages happy with the additional three holes - a challenge for the youths but at the same time not too hard for elderly members to play, so it doesn't affect their handicap," said Paul.

"I think we will be in a stronger position once the development is finished, as we are one of the cheaper clubs to join. You don't have to fight for a tee time here and you will be able to play 13 holes of golf to a good standard. We've got the facilities here too: snooker tables, a gym, bowling, football, cricket, tennis etc," explained Craig.

"It's a transitional period and I'm going to have to work hard to get it to the standard I want. I feel I can make Drax a really good golf club which people will want to come back to year on year."

USEFUL NUMBERS:

English Golf Union –
01526 354500
info@englishgolfunion.org
www.englishgolfunion.org

Sports Council –
020 7273 1551
info@sportengland.org
www.sportengland.org



The greenstaff have planted trees on the new land.



View from the new land looking across to the existing 9 hole course.



Paul Weaver Club Captain & Craig Lalley Course Manager.