



MERGER TALKS EXAMINED

The news that the Board of the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) had decided to terminate merger talks came as a sorry blow to the Board of BIGGA.

Talks, while slow, had seemed to be leading towards a compromise solution and the timetable to produce a report by the end of January 2008 appeared achievable. From the start the representatives of both BIGGA and the IOG agreed upon the principle of a combined business which lead to the signing of a 'Heads of Agreement' document that clearly laid out the purpose of the merger talks. Both sides recognised that the most difficult task facing them would be to produce a report to members that would secure their support, always assuming that the result of the talks indicated that a merger was to be recommended.

An in-depth analysis of existing memberships benefits, membership categories and subscription rates was undertaken by the staff of BIGGA and the IOG and it was noted that while both parties offered an excellent range of benefits there was, however, a large disparity between the categories and subscription levels. A formula was agreed that simplified the categories while retaining the professional standards needed to qualify for Full Membership and an alternative subscription structure seemed to provide an acceptable solution. Additional tangible benefits seemed to be difficult to pinpoint however the commercial advantages of a merger helped focus everyone's mind. In the final analysis it seems that the Board of the IOG does not feel that there are enough significant additional membership benefits to warrant continuation of the talks. That is, and always has been, the prerogative of either party. Meetings were always conducted in an orderly, friendly manner under the competent chairmanship of David Teasdale and the time given by representatives is appreciated by the BIGGA Board. And so where does BIGGA go from here?

Firstly I would emphasise that there has been no fall out between BIGGA and the IOG, if anything there is now a better understanding of each other's business and the common ground that exists. Secondly, the BIGGA Board has established a working party to review its original intention to develop the Association by widening the scope of membership to enable groundsmen to become members in their own right. Groundsmen can currently join BIGGA as Associate members however this gives them only limited benefits of membership. Another objective of the working party will be to consider converting the Association into a limited company, which had been identified sometime ago as beneficial, but was placed on hold pending the outcome of the merger talks. This will include converting the Rules of the Association into a Memorandum and Articles of Association for the Company under company law and also consideration of a business name and possibly a change of name for Greenkeeper International. As with any recommendations that would have arisen out of the talks with the IOG, any major changes will need to be approved by the membership. It is hoped that following full consultation with members that a proposal can be made to an EGM later in the year.

John Pemberton
BIGGA Chief Executive

NINE-HOLE COURSE HELPING TO INSPIRE

A Par 3 golf facility created using Huxley all-weather surfaces is helping inspire and produce a new generation of golfers in north Wales.

Laid out within Coed Helen Recreation Park, Caernarfon, the open access community short course is part of a grassroots golf project developed by Gwynedd Council using money from the Ryder Cup Wales Legacy Fund.



1st green at Coed Helen Recreation Park

Provided by the Welsh Assembly Government and administered on behalf of Ryder Cup Wales by The Sports Council for Wales, the Legacy Fund represents a £2 million investment in grassroots golf resulting from a commitment given as part of Wales' successful bid to host the 2010 Ryder Cup. The funding is intended to help local authorities, schools and golf clubs throughout Wales develop new low-cost open access facilities, seen as being essential in encouraging the take-up of golf by young people and others new to the game.

In addition to the Huxley short course at Coed Helen, the funding received by Gwynedd Council has assisted in the development of community golf facilities at four primary schools in the county.

STUDENTS ENJOY A WELL EARNED BREAK FROM THE CLASSROOM



BIGGA Midland Section supported Warwickshire College recently by arranging two field trips for their level 3 students. The venues were Gay Hill Golf Club and The Belfry. It gave the students a chance to talk to managers on a range of topics and see how management practices need to be suited to the demands of two entirely different operations.

The students met with Course Manager Paul Woodham during the visit to Gay Hill GC and with Kenny Mackay's two Head Greenkeepers for the The Belfry, Eric Olsen and Neil Smith.