



Chairman's Word

National Chairman, Peter Todd, gives his thoughts for the month

Over the past few weeks we have seen some wild weather conditions, particularly on the West side of the country.

Not only has this been devastating for the people going about their daily lives but will have further impacted on golf clubs income following on from the wet summers over the past three years.

The changing pattern of weather was one of the topics presented at the recent South East Regional Seminar and provided some useful food for thought. It was highlighted how over the past 40 years the number of days of frost has reduced by a third with an increase in average temperatures between October and December. At the club we have experienced daytime temperatures averaging 14.4 degrees C in October and 7.7 at night this year.

In contrast to having to deal with the problem of flooding and incessant rain on



A Flexible Approach Required

the West side of the country, the South East corner suffered from a continuous lack of rainfall this year. The amount of rain that fell in Cumbria in one day during the floods in November was similar to that recorded for eight months this year in Kent. From March to October we received only 343mm of rain against a 12 year average of 523mm at the club. As a result of this we had to postpone scarifying fairways until late September and also the overseeding work which followed on.

The unpredictability of the weather is changing many aspects of our work including the incidence of disease, the planning and timing of operations and being geared up to deal with intense rainfall patterns. When rain does come it can often fall as intense bursts that cause washouts to bunkers and course flooding.

It seems as though wherever you are in the country, time and money spent investing in ways to cope with high intensity rainfall patterns will soon be recouped in being able to resume play sooner after the rain stops. This may involve additional drainage work, reshaping areas to shed water away from putting surfaces or topdressing areas with sand. Opening up greens that are surrounded by trees that have been encroaching for years might be just what is needed to allow air movement and sunlight to aid drying.

The basics of keeping firm playing surfaces with careful management of thatch and an effective aeration programme certainly help by allowing these to dry out quicker but more is often needed if we are to be able to re-open courses quickly following these downpours.

Keeping healthy putting surfaces through good turf management practices remains the best way to combat disease but may not always be enough to eliminate all disease pressures. With the increasing temperatures being experienced in the autumn period, coupled with high humidity, having to use fungicides may still be necessary at times. However, by selecting the right active ingredient and mode of action to get on top of disease pressure at an early stage, it should be possible to minimise their use.

Having set dates/times of year when trolleys, powered trolleys and buggies can and can't be used on course doesn't work with the unpredictability of the weather. In contrast to wetter autumns, this year we allowed buggies to be used on fairways right up to the start of November.

The club has always left the judgement on these matters to the greenkeeping department to determine and so being mindful of the need to keep this revenue stream flowing as well as protect the course when making decisions, we have demonstrated that this

responsibility has not been misplaced.

When designing courses or making alterations to existing sites golf course architects need to bear in mind the changing climate in all aspects of their schemes including slopes, watershed patterns and drainage designs etc.

Capturing surface water run off in winter through a drainage system leading to a holding reservoir may well prove a worthwhile investment for many courses on the drier east side of the UK to make use of these intense rainfall patterns.

In some cases where no bore hole licences are available it may be their only viable option as when drought orders are put in place, mains water will not be available to them.

This whole subject of adapting to changes in weather patterns will continue to be a much discussed topic. Some argue that climate change and the causes of it are not just happening.

Wherever this debate leads will not alter the fact that we need to plan and manage a programme of work that has to be more flexible in its timing, respond to these climate related pressures and communicate this effectively.

Peter Todd
National Chairman