



News from the Chief Executive

Having had the approval of the membership at the AGM to convert the Association to a limited company the Board have tasked me with organising the legal work necessary. I have had preliminary meetings with solicitors and accountants to establish what needs to be done, by whom and by when. It is going to be an immense task but one that perhaps should have been done some while ago.

In the past the main deterrent has been the lease on the land at BIGGA HOUSE that is held by myself and a Past Chairman in favour of BIGGA. Once incorporated, then BIGGA can hold the lease in its own right but past owners of Aldwark Manor, in whose grounds BIGGA HOUSE sits, would not approve the changes. The current owner, Q Hotels, has taken a much more positive view and has sanctioned the changes. It is likely that BIGGA Limited will commence trading on 1st July and in conjunction with the accountants I am looking at the viability and advantages, if any, of splitting the commercial activities from the membership based activities and perhaps applying for status as a charity. We are hoping to maximise the revenue and minimise the tax burden!

The Board at its next meeting in March will be looking to fix a date for an EGM with a view to progressing its proposals for the better integration of sports turf groundsmen into BIGGA. Now that the Constitution has been changed to allow for voting by proxy everyone will have the opportunity to influence the future of their Association. We all acknowledge that there are still a great many greenkeepers who are not members and this we will attempt to address over the coming months. It is a matter of fact, however, that a lot of these non-members never will join for a variety of reasons. They have no interest in belonging to a professional association, they do not value being a member, they do not play golf or, perhaps, they are not interested in the more formal training and education that helps career development. It is also a matter of fact that in a commercial world it is numbers that count and BIGGA needs more members to be able to progress.

Let us not get carried away with the notion that greenkeepers are potentially going to be swamped by groundsmen. If BIGGA widens its base to cater for sports turf in general, just as the IoG has always done, then I would see a gradual influx of groundsmen taking place over a number of years. At the moment there are many, many groundsmen who do not belong to the IoG and so perhaps we can be of greater appeal. It's not about challenging the IoG more about offering a second choice that could help secure a better future for the Association and the industry.

We have tried the merger route and that failed but it did highlight how much greenkeepers and sports turf groundsmen have in common. Let's wake up to this fact and try to capitalise on it. If BIGGA does not embrace this concept soon then I have genuine concerns that another organisation will enter the membership arena and that is the last thing we need in today's economic climate. Golf is going to be hit hard by the recession in 2009 and some greenkeepers will lose their jobs as certain clubs struggle to balance the books. There is nothing BIGGA, nor any other body for that matter, can do about this if clubs act within the law. I hear criticisms of Greenkeeper International and the lack of jobs being advertised these days. I wish the critics would realise that there is a reason for this - there are very few vacancies and even then some are being filled by referral.

I seem to be always having a moan but I find it frustrating. BIGGA has grown on the back of the development in golf over the past 15/20 years. The Association has met many of its goals but in a shrinking market with overheads increasing and a decline in revenue how does it progress? The future rests with you, the member.

John Pemberton



SCOTTISH REGION - AYRSHIRE

Hello all, hope you're all well and looking forward to a good spring and longer hours in the sunshine?

Starting with Harrogate, I felt the show was well attended and the decision to make the seminars free a huge success. In fact, some missed out due to size of the rooms and I'm sure this will be rectified for next year. Quality and content of the seminars was high and I particularly enjoyed Colin Burns' (Winged Foot GC) and Gordon Irvine's (Askernish) presentations.

Another highlight was to see Ayrshire's own, if adopted, George Brown receive the Lifetime Achievement Award for services to the profession. George gave one of his trademark speeches and when he finished off by dedicating the Award to his lovely wife, Brenda, there was more than a few moist eyes in the room. When the photographer moved in for his shot of George with his Award, he asked George if he could "hold it up a bit", to which George quickly explained he'd had a bit of trouble with that lately!

Oh and I can't forget to mention Marshall Sloss' kind invitation to a whisky tasting event on the Wednesday afternoon in his room, with a bottle of his roommate's (Martin Lothian) Glenfiddich. Marshall assured the attendees that Martin had insisted that he could help himself to the malt, as it was brought to be drunk. This proved acceptable to us! After catching up with Martin and thanking him for his benevolence, he remarked "Aye, that's fine I was just hoping to o' been there n'aw!" or words to that effect. Cheers Dip! All in all a most enjoyable week.

Thursday, April 30, is the date for the Spring Outing to West Kilbride Golf Club. Get you're entries back to Derek sharp, as I'm sure this will prove a popular venue!

The Greenkeeper's v Secretaries Match will be contested at Strathaven Golf Club, on May 12.

The Scottish Greenkeeper's National Tournament takes place on Thursday, June 11, at Cathkin Braes Golf Club, in Glasgow. Hopefully we'll have a good turn out from the Section, as there will be a good bit of silverware to defend from the haul taken at last year's competition!

Auchterarder Golf Club hosts the annual Norrie Whittock Trophy, on August 20.

Irvine Golf Club hosted a presentation from Martin Ward (Symbio) on Monday, January 26. There were over 20 greenkeeper's in attendance and although the subject matter was academic in nature I'm sure everyone took something from it. I know I did! On behalf of the Section I would like to thank Irvine Golf Club for their support and to Martin Ward for an excellent, thought provoking, seminar. Thanks also to Jim Paton for expressing the Section's appreciation on the day.

Finally, footballers, and I use the term loosely, are required for our match against the West Section due to be played at Cambusdoon, Alloway, on Saturday, March 21, from 10am. Anyone interested in a run out can get in touch with me at: denis.t@hotmail.co.uk or: 01292 475309.

The plan is to have a friendly, yet competitive, match, some lunch and refreshments in the clubhouse then possibly into Ayr for further refreshments and an honest explanation of where the West lads got their tactics wrong!

Denis Tweddell