

Managing with less

Malcolm Peake reports on an enlightening workshop held at Temple Golf Club

Over the years Temple Golf Club has received numerous calls for advice and support from other golf clubs that have adopted, or are considering using, a more natural style of course management.

The Club is now working closely with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust and the two bodies decided to host an evening workshop entitled, "Managing with Less", sponsored by Symbio, which was at the end of February.

The aim was to explore the economic and environmental benefits of a sound and sympathetic course management policy, while maintaining the quality and playability of the golf course and respecting and positively contributing to the indigenous and social environment.

The workshop drew an audience of Secretary/Managers, Chairs of Green, Course Managers and greenkeepers from a wide area.

Since the early 90s, Temple has worked hard at reducing course management costs and enhancing biodiversity without compromising on the quality demanded by today's golfer. The workshop told the "warts and all" story of the journey.

Michael Barratt, broadcaster and former advisor to the R&A Golf Course Committee, chaired the evening and welcomed the guests, which included the Club President's wife, Strilli Oppenheimer, a world renowned environmental conservationist.

Temple's Secretary, Keith Adderley, spoke, not without a little irony, of the problems currently facing golf clubs. He posed the question "Why do we need to manage with less?" Many clubs are suffering from reduced income, and therefore having to reduce expenditure, yet golfers have increasing expectations.

What golfers see on TV, with tournaments being played around the world in eternally summer conditions and on golf courses especially prepared for one week of





the year, bears little relationship to the real world of golf played in the UK during the winter months.

Keith explained the issues affecting clubs comparing the expectations of the “Old Guard” of traditional club members, the lifeblood of any golf club, and the “New Kids on the Block” being those who were juggling an exceedingly busy workload with family commitments, with retirement seeming further and further away, and trying to squeeze a round of golf in whenever and wherever possible.

The time pressure of work and home life meant that most were unable to commit to joining a golf club full time but when they took to the course their expectations were even higher because their leisure time was so precious.

Keith expressed the opinion that communication was the key and stressed the importance of golf clubs having a robust Course Management Policy Document in order to ensure continuity and protect the Crown Jewels.

Keith talked about the benefits of holding informal members’ liaison meetings and the use of the internet and email to inform and educate members about what was happening on their golf course.

He also reminded the audience, that normal business principles

should apply - even to golf clubs.

Course Manager, Martin Gunn, then spoke eloquently of how a sound course management policy benefited the playing quality of the course and the indigenous natural environment.

He talked of how the low input natural poverty grasses had been restored with as much as 85% fescue/bent present on some greens and at worst 60% on others, and explained the substantial savings this made.

Martin then discussed how some clubs are using mains water at £1.17 per cubic metre, where as at Temple the club is using borehole water at £.09 per cubic metre, and since the early 90’s has reduced the quantities used by nearly 70%.

He also talked of huge savings in fertilisers reduced by nearly 75%, and where Temple used to apply 7/8 applications of pesticide to the Poa dominated greens, it is now normally only one application, which at around £800 a time, is a really big saving.

Martin discussed how course management objectives could best be achieved and provided guidance on quality standards with an emphasis on the benefits of using the measuring tools now available.

Soil moisture content could be measured by a probe, firmness by

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a Clegg Hammer and trueness by conducting holing out tests using a specially designed HOT ramp (shown).

Martin went on to explain that this information could be used to assist in preparing a golf course for play in sympathy with the way the architect, in Temple's case Willie Park Junior in 1909, intended.

He pointed out the delights of playing the British style of golf on firm, fast greens where shot-making skill and imagination are the name of the game, rather than the American style of target golf to softer surfaces.

He pointed out that this was now even being recognised in the USA where in 2010, the then President of the USGA, stated the need to look at golf differently, where brown, as opposed to lush green, was beautiful.

After supper, Gavin Bennett, of the BB&O Wildlife Trust, took the floor and talked about the benefits, including cost savings, of a less

intensive management style on the biodiversity. He discussed the management of the chalk downland meadow roughs and of their rarity and value as a UK priority habitat, which contain many nationally and internationally rare and endangered species.

Gavin pointed out that the meadow roughs at Temple represented 49% of those present within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and added that as in excess of 80% of the natural grasslands had been lost nationally since 1950, this was a very valuable asset.

He explained the importance of scrub as a crucial component of the habitat mosaic and how it should be maintained sensitively with work completed by the end of March to avoid disturbance to nesting birds.

He talked about the restored indigenous hedgerows and of their continued management, as well as grant funding available for scrub

and ancient woodland management. He suggested the woodlands would benefit with varying the structure to promote more diversity particularly for ground flora and suggested most of this work could be achieved when the weather was too bad to work on the primary golf course areas.

He finally talked about the advantages of golf clubs working with their local Wildlife Trusts and to an agreed management plan.

He explained that many rare and endangered species had been identified at Temple eg 425 species of moths and 24 of the 57 species of butterflies found in the UK which proved that Temple was an exceptionally valuable environment although there were still many areas where improvements could be made.

An open discussion and exchange of views, ideas and experiences and Michael Barratt closed the evening, with a vote of thanks to all at Temple.

Malcolm Peake is author of *Confessions of a Chairman of Green and A Natural Course for Golf*, available through STR!