



Chairman's Word

Returning to the back page of GI, BIGGA National Chairman, Andrew Mellon, shares his thoughts

Happy days are back again

Some welcome relief has come for many regarding hosepipe bans with exemptions being made in several areas.

Thanks to everyone who contacted HQ to share their concerns and provide useful information to help us address the water issue. We are continuing to work on this, as it is not something that is going to go away. Access to this vital resource will ultimately be a significant issue for all of us.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, many in the North have seen some long awaited glorious sunshine and with it increased soil temperatures meaning we finally get some good growth and the ability to bring the greens on. Happy days!

In the last few years I have watched with some interest the developments in some regions, where "consultants" have advised golf clubs that they can replace the need for a full time Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper. I've resisted the natural urge as a Course Manager to simply decry and criticise this development, but now wish to share some views and observations that I feel are relevant.

The golf course in most instances is the most valuable asset a club has. It is usually the most influential factor in attracting and retaining membership and visitor income to that facility. There are some exceptions, but generally speaking the condition of the course, specifically the main playing areas; greens, fairways, tees, bunkers, all feature highly in the golfers mind when they evaluate their experience, how much they enjoy the game and decide where they will play again.

Most clubs employ or engage a team of people to manage the day-to-day business and to best satisfy the needs of the members and visitors. The Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper, the Golf Professional, the Secretary/Manager, and Food and Beverage Managers all apply particular skills and knowledge to their areas.

The members are represented in most instances by their committees and appropriate sub-committees who seek to create the policies, strategies and general direction the club will take to best satisfy their membership.

We have all witnessed the increased expectations and standards required by golfers whilst the rise in the number of golf courses and the difficult economic climate have resulted in increased competition for custom. As clubs have struggled to create the necessary income to sustain these increased standards they have started to look closely at how they can cut costs. This has led many to consider the role of the "consultant" versus, as opposed to alongside, the dedicated Course Manager. They desire to emulate the success of those thriving golf businesses that are successfully drawing numbers and presenting excellent golfing experiences. Perhaps they should look more closely at how and by whom these facilities are managed.

It seems contradictory to me that the

product that attracts sufficient business to financially sustain the business. They have access to Group Managers, employed for their expertise, and use consultants appropriately. Yet they recognise the need to have dedicated Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers to ensure that their asset is professionally managed. They recognise the benefit an educated, professionally trained person brings to that operation in ensuring they present that asset to its full potential, making the best use of all the resources available.

They benefit hugely from sharing knowledge, skills, and resources across their facilities, and perhaps this is the area clubs should be considering when looking to become more effective, get better return on their investment, and manage their costs.

BIGGA is working hard to ensure you have the very best support, resources, education and training, and to enable you to share your achievements and difficulties with one another

ability to present the main asset at its very best should be an area that clubs consider compromising on. A "consultant" can be very useful in providing impartial and expert advice, helping to benchmark and objectively agreeing actions to maintain and improve standards at a facility. But with the best will in the world, they cannot be on site, with a close eye on the ball every day. They cannot take personal responsibility, understand the many nuances of that particular site, motivate staff and deal with matters that arise every day. Neither can they continually observe conditions as they evolve and take the most prompt and effective actions to achieve the best results.

Consider then the large commercial groups who own and manage many courses. They are very focussed on maximising income and minimising cost to satisfy the desires of their owners or shareholders to make a return on their investments. They must provide a

BIGGA is working hard to ensure that Greenkeepers have at their disposal the very best support, resources, education and training and to provide opportunities to share with one another their successful achievements and their difficulties. All this is of great benefit to golf clubs and ultimately the golfer. We receive and welcome the support of the other golfing bodies and they also recognise the significant role the Greenkeepers play in presenting the courses on which this great game is played.

I'd ask all golf clubs to consider very carefully how they can achieve their main asset's full potential and in doing so give themselves the best chance of being successful.

Remember if you have any questions or suggestions please feel free to contact me.

My best regards, Andrew Mellon
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