

Winter course management Q&A

As the UK shivers through another cold snap, Jim Cook finds out what plans greenkeepers have been putting in place for the winter months

Moortown GC, taken by Michael Joyce, a top 12 winner in the BIGGA Photo Comp 2012

Andrew Geddes – Clitheroe GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?

Fairway drainage, levelling and improving tee surfaces, bunker renovations, improving walkways, woodland management and dealing with e-mails from members.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

We discuss the programme of work six months in advance with the appropriate committee, and produce a monthly course report informing members of the winter projects. Depending on the size of the project, holes may be closed down or shortened.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Ground conditions at Clitheroe aren't suitable for contractors in the winter, although we have used Duncan Ross to install drains in the summer.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Yes, provide discreet hard standing access areas to the parts of the course where the winter project is taking place, also use boards and ground guards for shorter runs. Try not to leave soil exposed to the elements.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

We focus on finishing our major ground work before Christmas, smaller projects and woodland management commence in the New Year.

Andrew Mannion – Southerndown GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

Mostly bunker rebuilding work; we are currently installing EnviroBunker using old Astroturf which will take us about three winters to complete the whole course. We'll also be resurfacing and building several tees and managing gorse on the golf course.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

Before any work starts it will be advertised on notice boards and also the club's website. Because the bulk of our work is bunker related at the moment we use drop zones on any bunkers that are GUR to speed up play and stop any confusion.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

We're lucky to have a good selection of equipment to enable us to carry out everything in house, I'm also very lucky to have a good team of greenkeepers to work alongside who are able to facilitate the work.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Yes we have become very reactive to the weather, being proactive and planning has gone out the window the last few years as it's too hard to stick to a plan, so we go flat out in good weather conditions.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

We tend to just prioritise and anything that can be carried over to the following autumn/winter season will be. I'm lucky the club understand that over the last few years the weather has played a significant part in what we can complete.

Gordon Brammah – Hallamshire GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

Many and varied depending on a number of factors including course development policies, budget restrictions, available equipment and the weather. We have built new tees, putting greens and stone walls, installed drainage systems and improved paths, and every bunker on the course has been rebuilt.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

Communication. Members are more likely to complain about disruption if they are not kept informed about work on the course. A monthly greens report posted in the clubhouse or better still on the club's website will head off many awkward questions later on.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Contractors would be used for three main reasons – if specialist equipment is required, if specialist skills are required and if a project has to be completed within a limited timescale. An honest assessment has to be made by the club before pressure is put on to do the work in house.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by the weather?

Planning is the key. Getting major projects completed early in the autumn/winter before the weather closes in will give more time for the course to recover. Have contingency plans for if the weather causes serious delay and don't be overambitious with the number and scale of projects planned.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring, how do you deal with this?

Developing a good relationship with the members and the greens committee is essential. Course managers should resist taking on projects that are not properly planned and funded and they must fit into a realistic winter programme.

Robert Patterson – Royal Aberdeen GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during winter months?

Bunker work, rebuilding and extending teeing areas, and an intensive aeration programme on all areas with vertidrains and hollow coring machines. We started a five-year plan last year to rebuild seven greens on the main links, to remove the very old root zone material. We are doing the 18th green at the moment.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

All our work plans are discussed at committee level three to five months prior to being done. The information is then fed to the members through the notice board, website and newsletter. If temporary greens are required they are prepared well in advance and the membership will be aware of the conditions to expect.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Normally we would do all our work in house but we are using contractors to rebuild our greens as they have the proper equipment and expertise to do the work alongside the architect employed by the club. Any large drainage work would also be sub contracted to someone in that field.

4 Are there ways to minimise a winter project being affected by weather?

To a point but normally the weather dictates how much you can achieve. We always try and get the bulk of our winter work done before Christmas. We start projects early in October to make the best of the good weather. We would normally leave aeration work for wetter days so that at least the operator is inside a tractor cab.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

Get it done early. We need to have these greens we are rebuilding back in play by April so we have completed the work by the end of November. Planning work and communication is very important so that everybody concerned knows what is required of them in the coming weeks and months.

Robert Ransome – Diss GC



1 What kind of projects do you tackle during the winter months?

During the winter months we'll complete a variety of projects such as building and erecting nesting boxes, tee box construction, drainage installation and ecology rough and woodland management.

You get real satisfaction from completing a project and knowing that however big or small it has made an improvement to the course.

2 If a winter project will be disruptive to play, how do you manage this?

We always plan ahead to ensure that everything is done to minimise time and disruption to play. We communicate to our members via notice boards, emails and newsletters and in most of our construction projects we also provide pictures of what these areas will look like once completed.

3 When would you bring in contractors to undertake winter projects?

Although we make every effort to keep as much project work in house, plant machinery, irrigation installation and tree spading contractors are brought in. The expertise, knowledge and experience that come with the contractors we use are invaluable.

4 Are there ways to minimise winter projects being affected by the weather?

For the last 3-4 years we've balanced out our winter programmes to give us options, so if projects get put on hold, we can temporarily switch over to another until we can resume. Generally, if a project is safe and ground disruption is minimal we'll stick with it.

5 If there is pressure to complete a project before spring how do you deal with this?

I dedicate two or three members of the team to daily course preparation. When monitoring progress, if we come under pressure to complete I have the options of either additional hours or increasing project staff numbers. This may come at a temporary cost to the course.