

LOOK HUGHES HEAD GREENKEEPER AT WHICKHAM



Brian Hughes has been promoted to Head Greenkeeper at Whickham Golf Club in County Durham – and he's made a real impact recently by using compost teas.

Brian has been at the parkland course for over 25 years, and has witnessed difficult times, particularly over the last few years.

However he now enjoys the full backing of the club and is proud that their greens are continuing to improve thanks to his use of compost teas.

Brian said: "Just like many other clubs we had a hard time of it recently and unfortunately the club had to make difficult financial decisions which involved some redundancies. But we've come through the other side and we're a stronger unit now.

"I started using compost teas two years ago and it's been brilliant, the greens are in great condition. They just feel healthier – we've got away from the sterile soils of the past. It's great to feel that you're doing something right from a greenkeeping point of view, we don't use any chemical fungicides at all on our greens now. It's saved us lots of money on fungicides.

"I feel the club is ahead of the game compared to some. We haven't turned the corner totally but we're looking at a really positive future."



FLYING HIGH AT EAST BERKSHIRE

In GI June we featured a project at St Annes Old Links who used a drone to take stunning aerial photos of the course. Matt Nutter, BB&O Secretary and Course Manager at East Berkshire GC, also wanted to investigate how seeing the course from the air using an accurate, up to date aerial picture could help him assist and manage the estate.

After researching companies who provide imagery Matthew employed the services of PinPoint Golf, a company who specialise in golf course mapping and surveys to carry out the drone flight.

The drone flight produced a fully geo referenced ortho image, in basic terms a full GPS map of the golf course and estate.

"The first thing that impresses you is the clarity of what you are dealing with" said Matthew. "Most of us have used existing online maps when we've had to but we know that when you scroll in close you lose any detail".

The main key benefits that Matthew was looking to glean from the exercise was to review cutting lines and shapes from the air and to be able to measure areas that had been raising questions from the membership: areas of long fescue rough, distances of carries from tee to fairway, heather plantations and areas earmarked for further heather establishment. The software allows accurate measurements around the tees fairways, greens and bunkers and then creates a spreadsheet of the surface areas of all of the key features of the course. This will offer savings by being able to accurately measure to order the correct amount of sand, fertiliser and dressing.

Matthew and the team at

East Berkshire had finished a successful course renovation programme when the aerial was taken but any proposed course changes can be helped as the image gives the best possible view of how the hole looks now and the impact of any proposed changes.

The process really helps you understand what space you have and how best to utilise it from boundary issues to land purchase. An accurate record of your course from the sky is invaluable. This has been particularly useful when making presentations to committees and Board members with regard to proposed projects. As Matthew commented "it's hard to argue with a detailed image showing the exact areas concerned and proposed changes". The software package allows future updated work i.e. drainage, irrigation changes and general ground works to be added to the mapping. This allows a consistent and accurate record of the course and completes the final part of a meaningful Course Policy Document.

Matthew concluded: "We finally have a tool that I can put to a practical use. If it was just a pretty picture it would be little use but thanks to the accuracy of the image combined with the ease of use of the software I'm using it all the time. And the more I use it the more useful it becomes for others as a living breathing record of my golf course".

When drones with cameras were invented it wasn't to benefit the management of golfing estates and to beautify golf courses but for those that have used it in that way and have seen the benefits it certainly has created an incredibly useful by-product.