



A Stirling success

Stirling Golf Club has initiated a ten-year development programme. Course Manager James Lindsay is working closely with Swan Golf Designs to achieve a better golf course. Howard Swan outlines the plans, the reasons behind them and explains why a close and harmonious relationship between greenkeeper and architect is so important



PICTURED: James Lindsay

Working together

It is always an exciting time for any golf course architect to visit a new project, particularly one at an established members' club. A club that calls on an architect's services may be looking to improve its layout, the condition and presentation and, ultimately, the performance - financially and otherwise - of its course.

However, we are repeatedly faced with a club that has clearly made short-term decisions regarding improving the course - possibly due to several changes of committees and the personnel within.

The president's legacy and/or the captain's mark are so often left behind long after they have departed, and become an integral part of the design of the golf course whether they are good or bad.

They then remain as an example of the personal involvement of the enthusiastic non-professional in the course.

This 'Do It Yourself' approach inevitably leads to wayward evolution of the course. There is far too much focus on tiny details because those making the decisions are simply too close to the action.

Getting things right in the way the course is redeveloped needs to be in the hands of the professional architect who can assess and evaluate the design of the golf course.

The professional greenkeeper can then take that assessment forward into a practical execution.



So, what is the plan at Stirling?

Stirling Golf Club has formed a Course Development Group to give the desired improvement works a sense of consistency over the ten-year period.

Autumn this year is likely to see the start of a woodland and landscape management programme to recreate the indigenous character of the course.

This will be accompanied by three of four holes being rebunkered in accordance with the overall plan.

This will be a fine start and will demonstrate to the membership the extent of the improvement which can be achieved without massive disruption, without massive capital cost and be the basis upon which subsequent years' works can be built and expanded, given that the resources are available to do so.



A technical audit of the old irrigation system is going to be made and there will also be some modest field drainage improvements.

The renovation programme is then likely to consider the redesign of some greens and tees to improve the routing as well as more bunkering.

A holistic view

Moving on, it is vitally important that a holistic view is taken of any course at one point in time and from this analysis, made objectively by the architect, recommendations for its future development follow.

That holistic view needs to encompass:

The course's overall design - its length, its balance, its rhythm, its flow, its variety, its challenge, the orientation of its holes, the variation from its flights of tees for the differing standards of play.

The course's safety - so often taken for granted, a problem may not be addressed until it is too late. You need to think about potential hazards on the margins of the course, and the proximity of the players on the course to each other when positioning greens and tees. Too close and you have a problem.

The performance of the greens - their shape, size, contour and the number of pin positions they have to spread wear and tear, their orientation to create an improved



strategy of play, their entry and exit points, the featuring in their surrounds, their drainage, their bunkering

The performance of the tees - their size to ensure that wear and tear is managed relative to the way the flights are played by members and visitors alike, their shape and their profile

The performance of the bunkers - location, contribution to strategy, size and shape, playability, their technical performance in terms of drainage, both internally and in the shedding of water externally, sand quality, colour, depth and, some would argue most importantly, their aesthetic value

In each of these considerations, the ongoing maintainability of the





components has to be a vital consideration.

The performance of the various infrastructures of the golf course such as:

- **Its drainage** - the shedding of water, the collection of water, the speed of recovery from rainfall

- **Its traffic management** - the movement of feet, of two wheels, three wheels and four wheels, whether it be players or the greenkeeping team, needs to be considered and optimised in convenient routings.

This ensures speed of play is sustained and wear and tear and erosion is not allowed to develop in the playing area

- **Its irrigation**, not just how water is applied and what kind of system that is and where the sprinklers are, but a consideration of water management, from where the water is sourced to where it is stored

- **The setting of the golf course in its natural environment** - the management of the tree stock.

Not just endless planting exercises but balanced management, looking at areas around greens and tees to allow adequate air and light circulation.

Planned and structured new planting of appropriate, indigenous species to enhance the landscape quality and character.

- **The resourcing of the greenkeeping effort** and the accompanying presentation of the course - the shaping of greens to be consistent with the length of hole and the type of incoming shot. The framing of each green with collars and surrounds of increasingly graded heights of cut at ratios to maximise their differentials.

Hopefully, this type of exhaustive approach will provide any club with a blueprint for the future, by which the golf course might be operated.

This should lead to the production of a comprehensive Course Policy Document.

James Lindsay, keen to see the course at Stirling improved in the short-term and long-term, is looking forward to working with the

golf course architect in a collaborative approach to the task in hand.

However, no matter how good that approach might be, the membership need to be kept informed with the whole renovation programme.

So what is required from the greenkeeper to keep the membership on side?

Amongst other things – courage in your convictions, careful management to minimise disruption, information being given in the right form at the right time.

Above all – communication; from the architect and the greenkeeper. If this communication is unsuccessful, the membership will not be on board and it is doomed to failure without their support.

It has always been my view that helping the greenkeeping profession to understand more about what golf course architects strive to do and the basis upon which they try to do it will always bear fruit - and over 25 years of design and renovation seminars and workshops at BTME that has always been the intent.

Understanding more means a better result.

about the author



Howard Swan is one of Europe's most senior professional golf course architects. His career spans over 40 years and he has worked on over 400 projects in close to 40 countries from USA to China, from Iceland to South Africa. He worked with his father for 20 years, now with his son, William, for the last ten. He is a Past President of the Institute of the British Institute of Golf Course Architects and Chairman of the Golf Consultants' Association. He works extensively in golf education, being a GTC Quality Assured Training Specialist and has been a presenter at BTME for many years.