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Iain Harrison, Golf Course Superintendent, Bangor Golf Club, Northern Ireland, pictured (centre) with Everris Country Manager Colman Warde and distributor John Lindsay.



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Iain Harrison, Bangor Golf Club

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Stepping up



BIGGA's Open Support Team in action - just one of the many development opportunities the Association offers



Last month GI discovered how Andy Pullen has made the transition from Deputy to Course Manager at North Wilts Golf Club. This month we hear how Rob Sandilands has adjusted to making the same move in Cumbria and how the many opportunities BIGGA offer can help

Three years ago I stepped up to my first Head Greenkeeper's post at Grange-over-Sands Golf Club, an 18-hole parkland course close to Ulverston in the Lake District.

I had all the skills needed as I'd completed a string of qualifications and I had a good amount of greenkeeping and supervisory experience – it would be a breeze surely? I couldn't have been more wrong!

Although my qualifications covered all sorts of technical greenkeeping topics from woodland and environment studies to health and safety and spraying, there turned out to be gaps in my knowledge I really needed to be a successful Head Greenkeeper. The role of a manager, which is what I had had become, required the majority of my skills to be based on people skills and communication – topics barely mentioned in greenkeeping qualifications and textbooks during my studies.

Meetings were a brand new experience, as was dealing with the personalities on committees and issues with members of staff. Then came the paperwork; course policy documents, risk assessments, budgets, meeting agendas – the list went on!

In short, I'd started a new job I'd worked towards for years and I felt as though I was starting from scratch when it came to these new skills that were essential to my role.

Fortunately for me, greenkeeping is an industry that is full of people who are unbelievably generous with their time despite the demands of their job, and I was never short of support and advice when I really needed it. Since then, the learning curve has been steep and I have made mistakes, but most importantly, I have learned a huge amount and have developed the all-important skills I need to succeed as a manager.

I was invited to present a seminar on this topic during Continue to Learn at BTME. The chance to pass on my experiences and viewpoint to the next generation of Head Greenkeepers and Course Managers was a great opportunity and something I got great feedback on. Here are some of the main pointers...

Preparing for your first head role

• Volunteer

• Apply to be part of BIGGA's Open Support Team or volunteer at the BMW PGA Championships. Arrange short visits to



other courses to help with projects

• BIGGA Delegation/Future Turf Managers Initiative/CPD Scheme

• Free schemes and experiences that 'fast forward' many essential elements by condensing them into a short space of time and can be recorded on your CPD

• Preparation topics (not to be left until you are in the job!)

- Budget: get a template and build your own
- Agronomy: ask to walk the course when the agronomist visits
- Meetings: attend greens meetings to get a feel for their structure. You will meet dynamic, individual characters and encounter conflicts of interests
- CPD: get accredited for all the effort!
- Health & Safety: learn what the documents are, how to construct them and how they tie in together
- Regional section: establish a local support network and keep your finger on the pulse for those job opportunities
- Mentorships: would you benefit from a mentor to help you?

• Interviews

• Interviews are a two-way process; is the opportunity suitable for you? You need to consider your family and personal circumstances. Then you need to think about your potential new club's resources – how many staff and what equipment they have. Try and find this out in advance

• Either walk or play the course and make a plan with all the information you have acquired

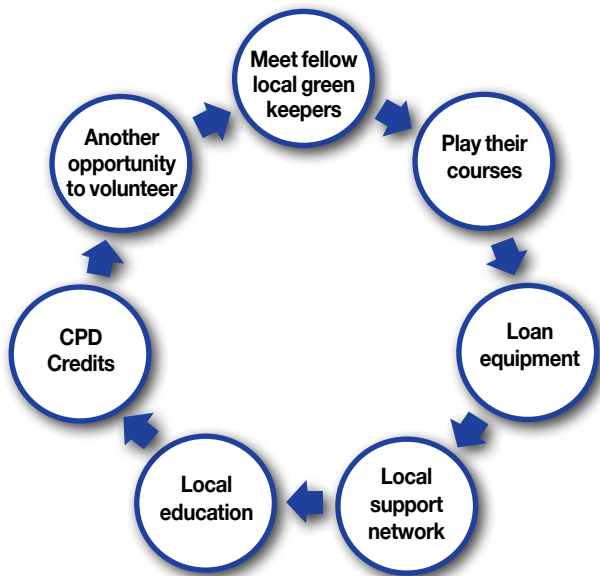
You've got the job! Now what?

- You will make mistakes – this means you're learning
- People will question you, it's human nature
- Check your plan is still on track and make changes if necessary – communicate at all times
- Take lots of early pictures to refer back to – continue doing this with work and projects

• Planning

- Thinking in detail about all your tasks in advance – what could go right or wrong and planning for both outcomes!
- Always have a plan B
- Use lists and whiteboards

BIGGA Regional Section Benefits



• Politics

- Communication is key
- You are the course custodian and need to ensure it is properly looked after
- Learn other people's language. Different people have different agendas, e.g. finance v greenkeeping. You must spell out the savings in time/money that will be made if you purchase a certain piece of equipment
- Remain professional

• Greens Chair

- A role of support and liaison to you
- A link role not a management role
- Should not interfere daily with work on the course
- Issues should be addressed and not allowed to develop

• Meetings and Committees

- The course is maintained on behalf of the committee and you are their expert
- Natural allies and adversaries will exist – again communication is key
- The best outcome for the club is the key to any meeting
- Set agendas and research your topics
- Remain professional – be diplomatic but assertive and stand your ground where necessary

• People Management

- You are a buffer between management and the greenkeeping team
- You won't have picked any of your team - remember you may not like or have anything in common

with them. They might not like you either – you represent change.

- You have the potential to influence their career, for better or worse
- Set down YOUR basic rules at the outset and stick to them – be consistent
- Your conduct and work ethic should be their benchmark
- Tell people what you want them to do clearly in black and white then let them get on with it – never assume
- Be decisive
- Rotate tasks – the key for developing a skilled and flexible team
- Praise people personally and to others
- Have and show trust in your team
- Respect takes years to earn but seconds to destroy
- Everyone is different and has their own strengths
- Let people have an input - they may know a lot more than you on a subject
- Swallow your pride if necessary!

Communication

- Very important
- Lots of great greenkeepers are poor communicators
- Give reasons how and why you are doing things
- Be consistent
- Communication is listening as well as talking

Golfers Comments

- Greenkeepers can be defensive, but golfers are your customer. Try and show willing to respond to constructive comments and suggestions
- Do not let staff become victims of offensive comments, they are a soft target for certain types of people
- You cannot please everybody!

Blogs & Social Media

- Free means of communication

- Enhance a professional image if done correctly

The benefits of your BIGGA regional section

Sales Reps

- There are no miracle products
- Ask for independent data, local testimonies and a free sample

Your Style

- Everyone is different and everyone's course is different
- What works for one may not work for another
- Don't let it get to you
- Ask people's advice, maybe get a mentor?
- Don't worry about the things you can't control, such as the great British weather!
- Mistakes are frustrating, but they mean you are learning
- Avoid stress wherever possible as it clouds judgment and affects your health and wellbeing
- Go home on time whenever you can!

Conclusion

Being a Head Greenkeeper/ Course Manager is about creating a balance between all the elements in this article.

The balance between these will differ from person to person and club to club depending on resources and expectations and this is where your expertise comes in.

The balance is always changing and should always be kept in mind as it has so many factors affecting it.

Yet again, this is proof (if it were needed) of what a varied yet underestimated career golf course management can be, but also what a rewarding and interesting job it can and will be for the next generation of managers waiting in the wings.

about the author

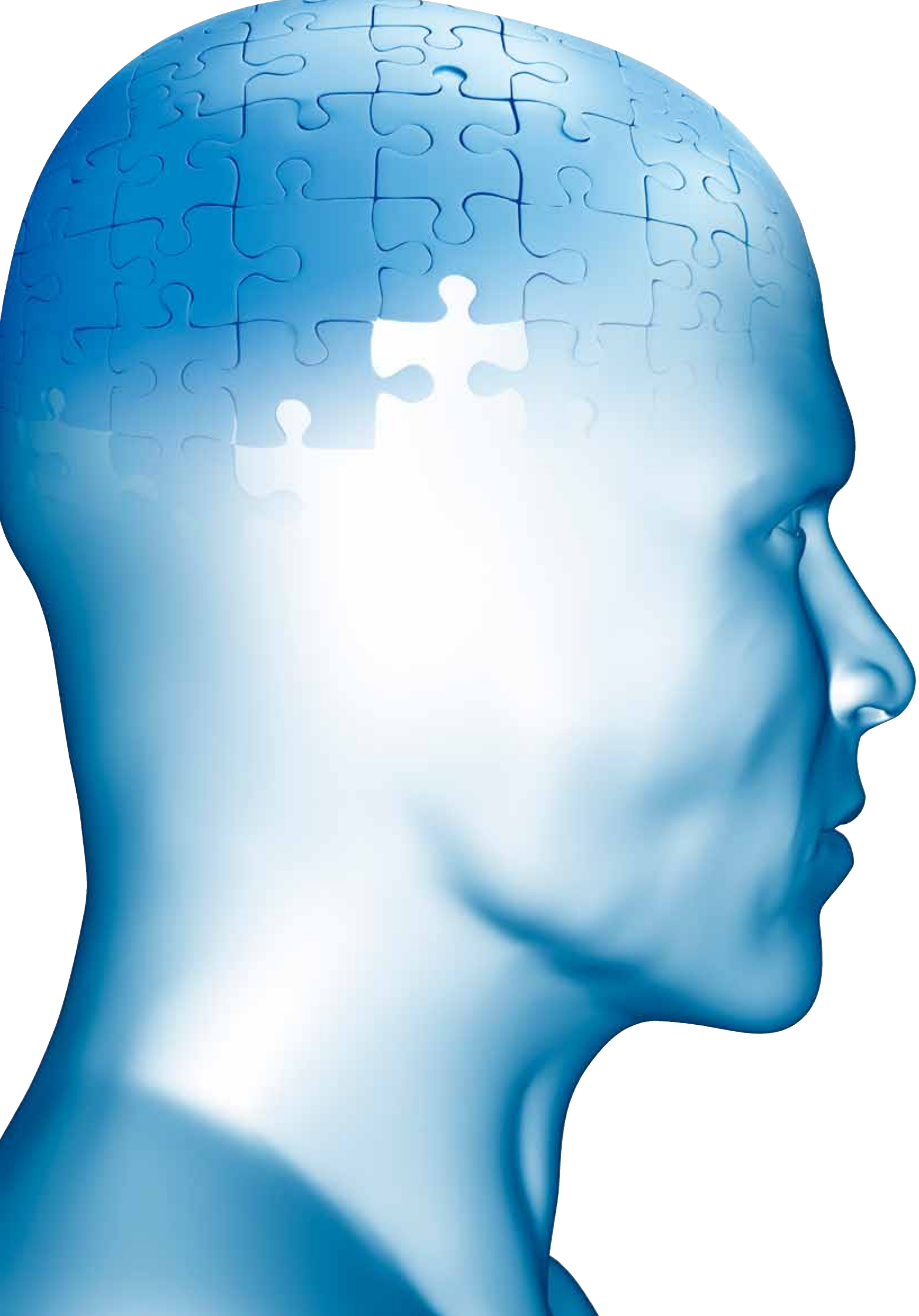


Rob presented a seminar based on his experiences as Head Greenkeeper during Continue to Learn at BTME 2014. You can read his regularly updated greenkeeping blog at www.gosgogreenkeeping.blogspot.co.uk and follow him on Twitter @RobSandilands

He has a National Diploma, Woodland & Environmental Studies, a B.Sc. (Hons) in Rural Resource Management, and NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Sportsturf. He also has PA1, PA2, PA6 Spraying Certificates, Chainsaw qualifications up to medium size trees, strimmers and brushcutters training plus Health & Safety, first aid and manual handling training.

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All in the mind

Attention! After a successful Turf Managers' Conference presentation at BTME, performance coach Karl Morris returns with advice on how to focus clearly on the important things in work, golf...and in life

It was a great pleasure to be asked to be a keynote speaker at BTME. I was tremendously impressed by the organisation of the event, the wide range of educational opportunities and above all the willingness to learn and the curiosity of the attendees.

When I first received the invitation to speak I wondered how much my work as a coach would be relevant to the audience and the challenges they currently face on a daily basis.

Yet the more I thought about it, the clearer the parallel became. Greenkeeping and sport are so similar in that they constantly throw challenges and setbacks at us and most of the time we are under pressure to perform and produce results.

Over the years I have been very fortunate to work with some of the world's best golfers and time after time I have seen how the very best are prepared to respond well to setback and disappointment. They have a mental toughness and tenacity to keep going when results are less than ideal.

There is no doubt we are living in challenging times at the moment - much of which is beyond our control - but our future success or failure will be determined by our RESPONSE to those challenging times, just as our response to a dropped shot or missed putt will define our ability to score well at golf. It is our mindset that is often the key between success and failure, not just the situation we find ourselves in.

I remember once hearing somebody say "the quality of your life will be determined by the quality of

your questions" and, from initially not understanding the gravity and importance of this statement, I am now convinced this single statement is possibly the most important concept you will ever hear. I don't believe in positive thinking in the form the media currently peddles it and various mind gurus, but I do passionately believe in the power of quality questions.

Quality questions focus one of your most precious commodities, your attention. Your success or failure in your work, your golf and your life, will depend, to a very large

degree, where you focus your attention.

In very simple terms, your attention will either be on something useful or useless. I am assuming as your eyes fall across these words, you are hoping your attention is currently on what you are reading. If it is, then you will more than likely gain something. However, your attention could be on what you need to do later, what you're going to have for tea or even what other people in the room are thinking about you as you sit reading Greenkeeper International. After





reading the last statement, you may have found how your attention has wandered. Sorry about that, but it does just highlight how fragile and temporary our attention can be.

So a major part of being successful is to understand and apply the principle of focused attention - and how quality questions can be one of your greatest assets in bringing your attention to the place you not only want it to be, but to a place which is useful and productive.

When you have the capability to direct your attention, you begin to take control of your world as opposed to the world controlling you. In the modern world, it would seem we constantly face a combination of factors and situations that are trying to steal our attention. This is shown in the incredible way people become addicted to social media, and in the constant stream of sound bites and calls to action which inhibit and restrict our capability to just be in the here and now with our attention. Is it any wonder that golfers can struggle to play a game which positively insists on them being attentive to what is going on, right here and now, in this moment, playing a unique shot they will never be confronted with ever again? It is exactly the same with our work. Either our attention is on it or it's not, and good ques-

tions can help us focus our attention in the most productive way to the challenges presented.

Often people ask dreadful questions focusing attention in a totally unproductive way. Think of a recent challenge you have had and ask yourself these three questions:

"Who is to blame?"

"How could I prove I'm right?"

"Why have I failed?"

Now if you have just run those questions through your mind, I don't need to be a psychic to know your current state is probably less than ideal to deal with the situation. The questions have directed your precious attention in to areas that are frankly useless. However if you had the same challenge and you asked yourself questions like this:

"What are my choices?"

"What is possible?"

"What is the best thing to do now?"

Run those questions through your mind in response to the same scenario and I guarantee that you will be in a different and more productive state because your attention is in a useful place. Most people ask habitually poor and unproductive questions, blissfully unaware how detrimental those questions are to their attention.

With many of the golfers I work with, I ensure they have sets of

questions that serve them well both on and off the golf course.

"What does a good shot look like here?" is a great question to ask when you are out on the course because it forces your brain to produce an image of the shot you want, as opposed to a shot you may fear.

"What did you enjoy today?" and "What did you learn today?" are two questions I suggest may be useful to parents when their child, who is learning the game, comes off the course. It sends the young mind's attention in the direction of learning and enjoyment, two priceless commodities if you are looking for future success.

Asking good questions is not about trying to be positive, it is about taking charge of how you use your brain in the most effective way and not falling into the trap of sending your attention habitually into areas that do not serve you well.

So, notice over the next few days the questions that you ask of yourself and of others and gain some insight as to whether they are serving you or not. Are your questions getting the best out of your colleagues? Are your questions effective in terms of persuading others? Above all, are your questions effective for yourself and what you want to achieve now and in the future?

about the author



Karl is recognised as one of Europe's leading performance coaches and created 'The Mind Factor' to help clients consistently produce outstanding results at all levels of sport and business. His new book is called 'Attention! The secret to you playing great golf'. For more information on Karl and The Mind Factor courses and products go to www.themindfactor.com

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A breath of fresh air

Effective aeration improves drainage, reduces turf compaction, thatch build up and boosts the health of golf course greens and fairways. Toby Clarke, Sales Manager for Dennis and SISIS, explains the basics of aeration, its advantages and which machinery you should look at

Q What is aeration?

Put simply, aeration is a mechanical operation that creates more air space within the soil. This increases oxygen levels allowing for better percolation of water and nutrients thus promoting a healthier plant.

Q When should I use different methods of aeration?

All greenkeepers will have or should have an aeration programme in place. These will differ from club to club depending on soil structure, budgets, staffing levels, amount of traffic, climate etc. An example of a greens programme is shown inset right.

Varying the depths at which you aerate is important to avoid 'panning' – which is when a compacted layer forms below where aeration has been carried out at the same depth for a number of years.

The top 100mm is the most

An example of a greens programme

- Spring/late summer and early autumn - deep tine to 350/400mm
- Hollow tine late summer and early autumn to 100mm
- March to October, solid tine every 3-4 weeks up to 100mm
- Slit tine when weather allows during autumn & winter months to 100mm-200mm

ABOVE: The Javelin Aer-Aid 1500 is a tractor mounted aerator that not only aerates with a vertical action, but also injects air into the root zone

important. Hollow tine aerating used for the removal of thatch and soil exchange purposes is generally undertaken from late summer through early autumn when recovery will be greater. However, using a small diameter hollow or solid tine to a depth of 50mm throughout the growing season will cause little disruption to play and will increase airflow and water/nutrient ingress during the drier months.

Q What type of machines should I look at?

There are many different types of aerator currently available and all are viable - if budgets allow of course! (see box on right page.)

In these tougher economic times we have seen a noticeable upturn in clubs returning to our Multitiner tractor mounted aerator. The SISIS Multitiner is available in 1.2m and 1.8m widths and is a drum-type aerator, which is ideally suited to a

range of applications. It has three drums with independent rotation and interchangeable tines (hollow/solid and chisel) with a maximum depth of 100mm. It's not only cost effective but also simple to use and maintain and is extremely reliable.

Pedestrian slitters such as our Autoslit are also proving popular when poor drainage becomes problematic and compaction issues prevent the use of tractor-mounted equipment. They can be used throughout the winter months with little or no disruption.

Q Why is aeration important and what are the benefits to the greenkeeper?

Low cut heights particularly on greens mean that regular aeration is vital. With cut heights as low as 3mm the plant needs a good well established root structure to supply the oxygen and nutrients needed to survive. Regular aeration will allow the plant to flourish. Obviously, a