

NGC GREENS DIRECTOR UPDATE
AUGUST 2020

Statement: The month of August is usually one of the busiest in the calendar, yet again COVID-19 has disrupted many of our routines. All the greens staff are now back and off furlough / clinical isolation, and hollow or solid tine work has been postponed till end of a now adjusted season. The backlog of Majors and Tournaments is catching up on the work that would normally happen this time of the year, we are working hard to make up lost weeks, and the results are starting to show.

This is an unprecedented time at the club, many members have played more in the last months than they would normally do in any normal year pre-pandemic. We estimate we are having over a thousand rounds a week, this is nearly twice the amount than in previous years, and is bound to have an impact. It is noticeable on the Par three Tees, where Oli has tried to repair divots that usually players would help with, using a sand box. Bunkers are looking better, rakes are sorely missed, but the guidance for 'no rakes' is still in place.

Course: There are over 110 acres of grass and woodland, this takes hours of cutting and maintenance. The Greens Committee have decided on a trial, allowing 1% of the course to grow long, in so called wildlands grass areas. You can see this happening successfully at other courses, it saves time on manicured grass cutting in areas that never see a golf ball, except for the odd rebound or massive wayward shot. We are not talking about in front of play areas, like seen on the 4th or 8th in recent trials. This will be areas similar to the left of 12th Tee box, totally out of normal play, an area up till now which is cut to the normal level of general rough. This 1% represents the size of a football pitch, and to not cut it 5 days a week we estimate it will save the greens staff up to 1man day per week, that's 8 hours where they can do other work. This trial will go ahead immediately, Head Greenkeeper, Dave Crampton, will identify these areas where you will not notice, or hardly notice that the grass has been left long. In parts it may look strange, we ask you to be patient with this project, it will save us time and money in the long run. It will also look nice once established, and is better for wildlife for those that appreciate these things.

Greens: The greens are maintaining their consistency and health; we have been lucky not to have too harsh weather. After consulting, we agreed to increase the speed to about 10 feet, this has been done by cutting .5mm shorter, we are monitoring the results, speed should stabilise after a while once several cuts at this level have been made. Aprons and fringes have been carefully cut, we think this looks and plays very well.

The tine work, usually done at the back of August, has been postponed till late September or early October, this will allow the Majors and Tournaments to take place that had been affected by the pandemic. You will have noticed some cracking on the 18th green, Dave Crampton has this in hand, GUR is marked by hoops, as spray paint is toxic to the greens. Other small areas are on our watch list, rest assured we want all greens to be consistent, healthy and as pristine as possible.

Planning: The Greens committee met on the 6th Aug, we had plenty to discuss. Our plans for winter work are almost finalised, some new paths and repairs are planned. The 9th GS bunker drainage will be addressed, 5th GS will have repair work to its wall, time and resources permitting we have several other bunkers that need attention and are on our schedules. Tee boxes are a major concern, we know their condition is far from perfect, this also is an area we intend to address, some irrigation issues on these Tees need attention, all of which is in planning.

Other points to note: Sand has been ordered to replenish bunkers, please consider purchasing a personal mini rake. There has been a noticeable lack of smoothing or raking by players after placing your ball.

The adopt a sandbag initiative needs much more support, those that do carry sandbags are helping immensely with the repair of fairway divots, Greens staff are repairing par 3 Tee box divots regularly. I enquired recently about rakes being reinstated, Golf England advice is to not have rakes still.

You will soon see two new warning 'clangers' on the 5th and 6th reinstated, these are bespoke vandal proof, made at cost, by a members' company.

New signage is working, walkers are stopping and looking before crossing the 7th-13th and 16th. The 1st safety sign, so far seems to be working well, the small bridge may be removed soon, definitely by the winter.

Other signage is being investigated to reduce walkers disrupting golf or walking off permitted footpaths.

The ball lifters have been a resounding success, we will paint or mark the lower leg of the device, it has been noticed it is difficult to see the lower part of the stick, especially from a distance, making the hole harder to identify from a distance.

Our attentions are back on the practice areas, the putting surface and bunker were neglected during lockdown, we accept this area is far from how it should be, and intend to resolve this soon.

Recently, we reintroduced the OOB along the 9th. The reason originally, when the course first played as NGC, was to deter play up the 11th, because back then the trees were small, but the trees matured and it was removed, as the need appeared to have gone. Recently it has been noted that some new and younger players have played down the 11th and over the trees towards the 9th green, even if only once, it's too dangerous to allow. The OOB runs from the fence at the rear of the 11th green, and follows the posts to the red path near the 10th T. This is the original markings as far as we can ascertain, there will be no post in the area next to the Blue Tee on the 9th, or in the semi rough to the side of 11th green, the OOB is marked as it was originally, we will investigate mentioning this on score cards in future. To protect the play on the 11th, don't hit off if you think you're so bad a shot that the players are in jeopardy, the OOB is not designed to protect putting on the 11th green, it can't, only you can.

Thank you to all members for being patient, the road to 'almost normal golf' has been a difficult one. With reduced staff, changes to equipment and the lack of direction and the absence of a permanent lead or committee, all which have given the team a challenge. We hope you agree; improvements are slowly being seen. The '5 good habits' are being promoted in the next club Newsletter, please role model etiquette and good principals, young golfers and some not so young, don't always know what's right or wrong, your example is what they copy, peer pressure and good examples is what makes young golfers better.

Looking forward to normal weather, nearly normal golf and sensible scores.

Andy Hall
Greens Director Designate.