

---

TO

**PYECOMBE GOLF CLUB**

**AGRONOMY REPORT ON THE GOLF  
COURSE**

**JULY 2015**

---

**DAVID STANSFIELD LTD.**

*GOLF COURSE AGRONOMY*

1 Derwent Court  
Silsden BD20 0QR  
UK

Office +44 (0) 1535 656849  
Mobile +44 (0) 7774 152701  
Email [agronomist1@outlook.com](mailto:agronomist1@outlook.com)

1 Derwent Court  
Silsden BD20 0QR  
UK

Office +44 (0) 1535 656849  
Mobile +44 (0) 7774 152701  
E-mail agronomist1@outlook.com

## **PYECOMBE GOLF CLUB**

### **AGRONOMY REPORT ON THE GOLF COURSE**

*Inspection date – 9 July 2015*

#### **1.0 PRESENT**

1.1 The course was inspected with Gary Hann, Alan Davey and Simon Wells.

#### **2.0 BRIEF**

2.1 To carry out a review of course condition and resources for maintenance.

2.2 To comment on findings and make recommendations for future action.

#### **3.0 COURSE CONDITION**

3.1 The course looked well and had good definition. The only evident defect in playing performance was a slightly bobbliness of ball roll on some putting surfaces where seed head development was not being properly dealt with using the old mowers.

3.2 On a technical level, I thought the greens were in as good a condition as one could expect at this stage. It has been a poor growing year to date, leaving the turf with a pale, mottled colour and a lot of green Fairy Rings. However, grass density was good, ball roll was at least very satisfactory, pest and diseases are being well managed, and there are positive developments in bringing the turf type to the best possible mix for year round play in the long term. Underneath the greens, structural management is giving excellent results, achieving the necessary targets in thatch control and compaction management in most cases, with the results from hole to hole lagging only a little behind where there are special problems at a small number of greens.

3.3 Green surrounds were generally complete and neatly graded. The one poor feature was the amount of clumped Perennial Ryegrass in close mown collars that will be best removed. This can be done chemically, using Rescue, but the amount of Ryegrass that will be taken away will then lead on to a requirement for returfing. As such, bypassing the chemical treatment and going straight for returfing is perhaps the better option. Try one or two zones in the late autumn to see the difference, either buying in Fescue turf or using material from the nursery.

3.4 The fairways were attractive and generally complete. Weeds were at a low level. There was no evident moss.

3.5 Thick rough has been less of an issue this year, given drier weather in spring. Nevertheless, it could still be seen there has been some success from spraying Yorkshire Fog with selective herbicide in a wide band to each side of the close

mown fairway. This work will need to be ongoing *pro tem*, but I do not see it as something you will need to carry out every year forever. To achieve an even better result I suggested a further spraying of Rescue in the autumn, 2-3 weeks after the routine annual clearance cut.

- 3.6** The overall standard of the tees is getting better with time as a result of improving maintenance and progressive redevelopment, e.g. at the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Looking ahead:
- We discussed the possibility of enlarging the tee at the 4<sup>th</sup>, which will need widening by, say 50% to the left to make the platform more playable throughout the year, including winter competitions. This will also allow better traffic management at the front by enabling you to move the winter mat away from a high traffic area.
  - At the 1<sup>st</sup>, the droughted strip to the rear is caused by an extension having been built using too sandy a rootzone mix. The need is to dig out 15-20 cm and replace it with good topsoil or a richer 50/50 divot mix prior to returfing.
- 3.7** The Pyecombe course has certainly become more heavily tree'd over the years. Although this is visually attractive, shade and shelter are both highly detrimental to close mown turf, especially on greens and tees. So the growth of the trees cannot be unrestricted. The action taken to get more sunlight to the 7<sup>th</sup> tee has been a great success, and I expect a similar benefit at the 10<sup>th</sup> tee following woodland work here. At the 4<sup>th</sup>, the tree line to the left of the carry must be cut back for reasons of safety, as well as to accommodate a future widening of the tee platform.

#### **4.0 GREENS SURVEY**

- 4.1** To put more detail on the general description of the putting surfaces, a survey was carried out of the grass mix from green to green, thatch depth, compaction control and moisture availability in dry weather.
- 4.2** A combination of overseeding and environmental manipulation is adjusting the grass type on putting surfaces to something better tuned to a downland environment. The purchase of an overseeding machine (Charterhouse) has been highly valuable in this respect, encouraging an increase in the percentage of Fescue species at the expense of both Bentgrasses and Meadowgrass. The only greens that are now wholly dominated by Meadowgrass are those with the highest level of player pressure per unit area, e.g. the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and practice putting green. Having said that, even on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> overseeding has made some impact, giving a base population of Fescues in the order of 20%. And at the 12<sup>th</sup> there is at least 20% Bentgrass, even if Fescues have not made an impact to date. The one green with a purely Meadowgrass stand is the practice putting green.
- 4.3** On the majority of greens, typical Fescue populations are 30-40%, which is a very positive trend from a low beginning. On wetter greens at the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, Bentgrass populations still exceed Fescue, but this is not a problem in need of attention. In most cases the percentage Meadowgrass is less than 50% of the whole, which is an achievement.
- 4.4** The weakest green seen on the day was the 12<sup>th</sup>, which is one of the smallest. Nevertheless, the similarly sized 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> were significantly stronger. The assumption is the 12<sup>th</sup> has a poorer soil, so it may be that one or two extra applications of granular fertiliser are needed here (e.g. Autumn/Winter Sustane) to bring the turf to a similar standard to the norm in the short term. This is worth a trial. Looking forward, inputs of Zeolite in conjunction with each vertidrainage may bring

about a more stable improvement. The alternative of building a new, larger green with a better rootzone will be a high cost approach.

- 4.5** Beneath the grass cover, typical thatch depth was within target range, i.e. 10-15 mm, well ameliorated by top dressing. There were no symptoms of lingering wetness.
- 4.6** Root growth was good, generally within the range 8-10 cm for the main bundle, independent of turf type at the surface.
- 4.7** Resistance readings with the penetrometer were consistently in the range 50-55 bars through vertidrain depth, which indicates positive compaction control. A coordinated visual assessment showed the lower profiles that have a high clay content to be well fractured and friable for the most part. The two exceptions with resistance readings at 65-70 bars were:
- The 10<sup>th</sup>. Here I found some excess compaction at 15-18 cm from the surface where the top dressing accumulation meets the poor quality imported rootzone mix. However, this was not enough to warrant a return to Drill and Fill at this stage.
  - The 15<sup>th</sup>. This green too had a tighter soil at 15-20 cm, but this did not appear to be a particular problem and no exceptional treatments were advised.
- 4.8** Excellent results were being achieved from irrigation in prevailing circumstances. I found a consistent moisture meter reading at a sensible value, only rising to a slightly higher result at the 9<sup>th</sup>, as might be expected.

## **5.0 GREENS ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1** All greens everywhere have had a slow start in 2015, regardless of their situation or maintenance plan. Very short mown grass simply does not grow when night-time temperatures are frosty. Where there have been variations from club to club in the speed at which the greens have come to their summer best, this has generally been dependent on the volume of winter play and so the amount of accumulated trampling damage that has had to be recovered once the new growing season has started. This though is not to suggest the Pyecombe Club makes extensive use of winter greens to gain 2-3 weeks more of marginally better putting surfaces in spring.
- 5.2** The most significant defect in greens' presentation at that stage was the extent of flowering of the Meadowgrass component of the turf, which was affecting the trueness of ball roll on many putting surfaces. As such, the easiest improvement to be achieved is through better mowing with groomer units. Given the size of the greens, it is best to have groomer units fitted to pedestrian-operated mowers rather than the triple. Groomers tend to cause scrubbing at the margins with tight turning, and this is always a bigger problem when using triple mowers. However, it was reported the Club's current pedestrian-operated mowers are at least fifteen years old and highly unreliable. Just two were workable at that time and this is not enough. Therefore, I recommended the Club has a demonstration of new hand mowers with groomers to see the difference at the same height of cut – mow with an old machine then mow again with the new one – with a view to future purchase of three new units. Agreed, you cannot mow with hand machines all the time, but this is invaluable 2-3 times per week during key periods in summer, and for the mid-autumn to early spring period. If three new hand machines are really unaffordable, then look at the possibility of fitting groomers to the triple as second best, but this is second best.

- 5.3** Turning to the technical makeup of the greens, very much a highlight of the visit was an obvious increase in the percentage of Fescue species in the turf, something that has been a long term target in the restoration of downland grass cover on the putting surfaces. Only two greens are not showing a positive result in this respect, the 12<sup>th</sup> and the practice putting green. Even the wetter 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and the smaller 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> have moved forward. I have no doubt the main reason why there has been a positive change in the past two years is that now you are putting the seed into the ground with a good machine. This makes all the difference. This being the case, my recommendation is to focus overseeding on a Fescue mix only (e.g. Barenbrug Bar Fescue or similar) and miss out the Bentgrass. Aim for four overseedings per year at 10 g/m<sup>2</sup> each. With Fescues you can start in March/April and go through to mid-October. The objectives are: to maximise drought tolerance and disease resistance; to aim for minimum demand for fertiliser and water inputs; and to achieve smoother greens for longer in both summer and winter, with less seed head production.
- 5.4** It is understandable the practice putting green is reluctant to change turf type due to a very high pressure of play per unit area, but it is difficult to see why the 12<sup>th</sup> is so much different to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>. This can only be in soil makeup, so I suggest trying a high input of Zeolite in conjunction with vertidrainage over the coming year. This has been helpful on other stressed areas, e.g. at the 5<sup>th</sup>.
- 5.5** Putting surface turf had good density and completeness, albeit only a moderate vigour. There was low moss and no more than the expected amount of weeds. The greens would look more attractive in summer, and the Fairy Rings would be less obvious, with a higher rate of nitrogen input. But then the overseeding programme will be less effective, you will need to carry out much more mechanical work to control organic matter build-up, and you will need more fungicide input to manage diseases. So the extra cost will not only be on additional fertiliser treatments, there will be more disruption to the putting surfaces on average, and the overall maintenance bill will rise considerably. The best improvement you can make to putting surface performance will come from better mowing, as noted in 5.2. As such, I recommended you stick with the Symbio programme until the next review, with just occasional granular applications using Sustane or similar, as determined by need from green to green (say 1-3 applications per year). Also continue to use Phosphite in autumn.
- 5.6** Fungicide use at Pyecombe is significantly less than the norm in South East England. Good. The main requirement in 2014 was to check Anthracnose, which was especially bad in summer last year because of a cold August. This is not likely to repeat itself in the current year, but if you do see anything use Heritage and autumn/winter fertiliser as a combined treatment. Note that by increasing the percentage of Fescue in the greens you are directly reducing the likely severity of any attack by this particular disease.
- 5.7** I did not see a need for further use of Rescue selective herbicide at this stage. The selective herbicide in stock can be used to treat broadleaved weeds that cannot be removed by hand.
- 5.8** The current aeration plan is effective, economic and least disruptive over the full year. There is no obvious need for more Drill and Fill as a supplement at this stage. Nevertheless, I must emphasise that it is highly desirable not to change the August vertidrain operation to an October/November treatment. Certainly this will be less effective. Also, there is a much higher risk of leaving poor greens for longer right through the winter period. Recovery time is quickest in August and the risk of surface damage as a side-effect is far less. Use new 12 mm diameter pins to 25 cm on a 50x50 mm pattern, with 5-10 degrees of movement at the tips.

- 5.9 Measurements and visual examinations on the day showed just two greens to be slightly more compacted than the norm. In these cases only consider an extra pass with the vertidrain in autumn, if ground conditions are ideal for the work.
- 5.10 That there were more wet spots on the greens last winter is, I think, is due to the fact there was a lot more rain than usual over a long period from October onwards.
- 5.11 There were no signs of any negative effect from using the Turf Iron. Nevertheless, still be cautious about overuse and certainly avoid this machine if the greens are wet on top.
- 5.12 I did not see a need for any deep scarifying treatments (Graden) this year.
- 5.13 The top dressing programme is going well. There has been no obvious downside to changing to sand-only top dressing to date. I did not see a requirement to amend the frequency or quantity of applications or, indeed, the sand now being used.
- 5.14 Irrigation of greens was going well. There was adequate moisture through the full profiles without excess. Using the Field Scout moisture meter, set this for a sand treatment at 5 cm. Ideally, the greens need to be maintained with a moisture content in the range 15-20% at this point, possibly rising to 25% at, e.g. the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, which inevitably will be wetter than average.
- 5.15 When modifying the 16<sup>th</sup> green, lift the existing putting surface turf to 2 cm thick, having avoided aeration for several weeks. Preserve this for reuse. Aim to replicate the existing rootzone profile in the new area, rather than import new/different materials.

## 6.0 OTHER AREAS

- 6.1 No new comments were made on the ongoing management of green surrounds, tees, fairways or bunkers. Where suggestions have been made for the rough these are covered in Section 3 above.

## 7.0 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 As the Club is aware, key insecticides have been taken off the market. Also, the number of available selective herbicides has been reduced significantly of late. As things stand, there is no good alternative insecticide for use course-wide. Any infestation of Leatherjackets on greens can be treated culturally, with black plastic sheeting, but this will be impractical for larger areas. The hope is that some other new techniques will come along in coming years, but it is worth emphasising at this stage the progressive removal of pesticides from the market is a long term trend that will bring increasing difficulty in presenting golf courses to the standards players are used to today. For example, the buzzwords of consistency and uniformity will be especially hard to live up to year round. Play the ball as it lies will again be the rule of thumb.
- 7.2 We have not reached the point of pesticide-free maintenance yet, but it is important to flag this up for the future because courses cannot be changed from chemical to cultural management overnight. As such, it is good to be able to report the Pyecombe Club is well ahead of the game in this respect, having positive policies for the effective control of diseases, pests and weeds through cultural techniques. Current reliance on agrochemicals is at a low level.

## **8.0 NEXT VISIT**

- 8.1** The next review is scheduled for summer 2017, subject to confirmation. Of course if I can be of further help in any way in the meantime I hope the Club will be in touch.

**D M STANSFIELD**  
*16 July 2015*