

PRESTWICH GOLF CLUB NEWS

March 2020



SUMMMER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER & THE START OF THE MOST EXCITING SEASON FOR PRESTWICH GOLF CLUB

MEMBERS OF THE CLUB HAVE SUFFERED TWO YEARS OF NINE-HOLE GOLF AND DISRUPTION TO THE CLUBHOUSE FACILITIES.

**AT LAST IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE THE
RE- LAUNCH OF THE CLUB**

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### **COURSE COMPLETION**

Greasley's completed the course construction contract in November and handed the management over to Chris however there is a commitment from them to return in March to complete the footpaths and any snagging jobs such as minor drainage issues etc. They made a token attempt to level the tracks they created to allow their heavy machinery to cross the course but of course when they return these will be damaged again.

The final jobs they completed before they left was turfing the eight/ninth fairways which should ensure that these are available for play during the coming season. They also seeded the remaining fairway & rough areas around the seventh & tenth holes using hydro-seeding techniques which ensures rapid growth once the rain stops and the temperature raises.

You have to feel for Chris and his team who are desperate to complete the regular winter maintenance to the whole course and nurture the newly constructed areas ready for the new season but has been restricted from even taking machinery onto the course because of the unprecedented rainfalls we have been experiencing.

A bonus for the club is that when Greasley's return they have promised to extend the pond on the fourth hole as a goodwill gesture.

We are now in the hands of the weather and trust that the rain will stop at some point and the temperature rise allowing the course to recover and the new areas to grow.

Any hopes of an early May opening have now gone but Chris is confident (weather permitting) that our target date for the opening of the course can be met.

### **V.A.T FREE CONTRACT**

The Board were involved in some complex negotiations with regards letting the Course Construction Contract. The Club had completed the tendering process and were set to appoint Greasley's as the selected contractor.

Our Contract with Mulbury included guarantees that the course would be completed because a clause in the Planning Approval meant that none of the houses could be sold until the course works were completed.

To this end a sum of £650,000 was placed in an Escrow account reserved solely for the course contract.

Clever negotiations resulted in allowing Mulbury to manage the contract as part of the New Build process and therefore attracting no VAT. This enabled the contract and all the negotiated extras being delivered within the Escrow Account sum and saving the club in the region of £120,000

### **THE CAPTAINS' DRIVE IN**

You will be aware that the Captain for the 2020 New Course Opening Season will be Mike Fitzpatrick who has been offered the opportunity to extend his Captaincy of the Club to celebrate the launch season of the new course.

The Captains' Drive in will take place on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March and will mark the symbolic opening of the new course utilising New First Tee however the competition will revert to the regular nine hole course we have been playing. Join in the celebrations – not just marking the first day of the Captains' year in office but the start of most exciting year In the Clubs history.

### **OPEN COMPETITIONS**

For the first time in a number of years the Golf Committee has announced a full programme of Open Competitions to celebrate the opening of the new course and allow visitors, particularly from local clubs to experience our new course.

The Competitions include:

MIXED PAIRS OPEN – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July

TEAM OPEN – Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August

LADIES' TEAM OPEN – Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September

GENTS' SENIORS OPEN – Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September

The Golf Committee are organising other Team & Charity Events and details will be available soon.

At last we have a course to be proud of so invite your friends and colleagues to these open competitions and show off our facilities.

## FINANCIAL POSITION

The Club Accounts and a Detailed Statement of project costs such as clubhouse refurbishments, course reconstruction costs etc. has been available to members for viewing in the clubhouse for the last couple of weeks however the major projects, as essential as they were, are only half the story when considering spend associated with the income from the land sale.

For twenty plus years prior to the land sale the club had been operating at a loss, varying from £10k to 30k per year. The Club relied on windfalls such as the selling land for the telecommunications mast, selling parcels of land to Heathlands, compensation from United utilities for civil engineering works across the course, later selling the telecommunications mast lease, and many more to keep the club buoyant. Just before the land sale was finalised the debts had accumulated and the club was probably only months from being declared bankrupt.

The income from the land sale was the latest windfall which not only enabled the club to settle all of its debts but also develop the course and refurbish the clubhouse thereby developing a facility fit for the future. However it did not address the underlying issues of the business operating at a loss. This would continue and even increase throughout the redevelopment period as we lost membership and foot golf / green fee incomes decreased.

As well as managing the refurbishment projects the Board were tasked with minimising the operating losses of the clubs activities.

They were determined to ensure the medium term financial future of the club was secured and invested £250,000 in a bond which was to be retained for the clubs security in later years.

The overall management of both the refurbishment projects and the day to day operations was a big commitment for the Board, fortunately were two of three of them were retired and able to commit substantial time to the club.

At the last A.G.M the Board announced a recovery plan designed to tackle the Clubs operating losses. This included separating the golf operation from the bar and catering activities. A separate company was established which enabled the associated costs and incomes from each activity to be accurately recorded.



Whereas the income from golf is centred on Members Subscriptions and green fees etc. which could not be increased over the short term the bar/ catering activity had the opportunities to develop additional income.

With the clubhouse refurbishments completed, particularly the inclusion of disabled facilities we were able to attract new business from training agencies. Contracts with the N.H.S and British Gas has attracted a completely new income stream throughout the last twelve months and the trading position has improved. There is still a lot to do to completely separate the two businesses, settle the initial business loan from Prestwich Golf Ltd. to the new company and allocate all costs to the right cost centres, however the Bar/ Catering side is showing potential to return a profit

With the current levels of membership and the reduced income from green fees etc. the golf operation produces an income which well below the cost of operating the golfing facility. The plan over the next twelve months is to attract up to 40 new members which would put the golfing side of the business in profit. (Twenty new members would break even) The signs are looking good with a number of new membership signings having been made prior to the course opening.

You may ask why, if the golfing operation is operating at a loss, the Board offered free membership subscriptions for the first three months of this year. The Board considered that without the exceptional loyalty of the core membership throughout the reconstruction period the club would have probably folded and wanted to reward that loyalty.

With the considerable distraction of the refurbishments behind us the Board can now fully concentrate on the management of the two companies. The board had their own ideas on shaping the future of the club but considered it essential that the membership /shareholders have their input to the future shape of the club. To this end they commissioned a Club Survey to managed by Players 1<sup>st</sup>, the preferred partner of England Golf who specialise in providing surveys and analysis of the results for golf clubs.

The Board received a presentation from Helen Searle, Club Development Officer at the last Board Meeting with the results of the survey. The Response from the members was good with 62 members (45%) responding.

Detailed results of the survey are still being processed and will be produced in another News Letter dedicated solely to this topic. However you can be assured that all future developments of the Club will be based on the members comments made through this survey.

## GREENS EQUIPMENT

There seem little point in investing so much money in refurbishing the golf course if you are not capable of keeping it in pristine condition. For years the Greens staff have had to make do with second hand / refurbished equipment and in some instances go without the equipment required to present the course to members. It is testament to their skill and dedication that the course was presented in such good condition over these years.

It was always the intention of the Board, once money became available to replace the old and worn out equipment and to provide Chris and his staff with the very best equipment available. We would then develop a rolling replacement programme which would ensure the club maintained the right equipment for the job. Following a couple of break-ins resulting in the theft of key equipment the programme had to be brought forward but never at the expense of purchasing equipment that didn't meet Chris's specifications, on occasions we would hire temporary equipment or use suppliers demo equipment until the right machines were available.

This presented a second problem, what is the point of buying all this expensive equipment and putting it into the same greens sheds that proved so simple to break in to. Our Insurers were not willing to cover the risk also and so we had to invest in new, more secure storage facilities and completely fence off the greens equipment area. This was a task we should have done years ago if we had the money in order to comply with H&S Regulations. The area was also alarmed and covered by CCTV.

We are now considering the replacement of the Verti-draining equipment which again is an old piece of kit which requires extensive repairs.

There is just one item outstanding on our list of improvements to the greens equipment and that is the installation of a wash off water recycling bay which captures all waste and spillages resulting from washing down the equipment. At the moment this waste runs down the compound, across the car park and if hasn't been absorbed in the ground by then enters the main drains on Hilton Lane. This is essential kit and it is only by good fortune that we have not been prosecuted for the manner in which we have been dealing with our waste.

This will make the total spend on grounds Maintenance equipment something in the region of £200,000

## CLUBHOUSE REFURBISHMENT

You will all be aware of the refurbishments made to the interior of the clubhouse:

- Refurbishment of locker rooms, toilets showers etc.
- Provision of new / additional lockers
- Installation of new disabled stair lift
- Provision of disabled toilet facilities in the main lounge areas which required door widening etc.
- Refurbishment of the lounge areas toilets.
- Installation of a new boiler system.

The lounges have been decorated and new projector / screens etc. fitted but the majority of the costs for these works have been met by bonus payments made by the brewery,

The installation of disabled toilets etc. serving the first floor has provided valuable income generated through the provision of training facilities which has attracted business from the N.H.S., British Gas and Bury M.B.C.

Our leaking roof has presented problems over the years with too many temporary patch jobs resulting in leaks reappearing. We have had several expert opinions on how the issue should be tackled and have come to the conclusion that the long term solution is to replace the entire roof and fix the underlying issues with the design faults at the same time.

Quotations are being sought for the works and a contract will be let in the near future.

The kitchen has so far received very little attention only replacing items as they are required. A plan for the complete refurbishment of the kitchen has been drawn up and will be implemented as soon as funding is available. (*see item on outstanding / future projects*)

## JUNIOR SECTION.

As members are aware the Junior Section of the club is non-existent mainly due to lack of support for various reasons not least the extensive legislation relating to the care of children.

Board members regularly attend England Golf seminars relating to recruiting and retaining members. Ageing memberships' is seen as the biggest issue and England Golf see the recruitment of juniors and families as the only route to securing the future of golf clubs. The age profile of the club is:

- Below 25            8%
- 26 – 40            11%
- 40 – 60            31%
- Above 60           50%

In the recent survey when asked “would you think you will be a member of the golf club in two years’ time” 17% said “No” – the reason given was “I would be too old.”

Many of our mid-age range members started as members at the club and have either remained members throughout or have left for family reasons and re-joined when home / employment commitments allowed them.

Tony Meachin, one of the new Board members has volunteered to manage the development of a junior section within the club. He is currently attending various training courses and working with England Golf to allow the club to gain the necessary safeguarding and protection qualifications required by the club to comply with legislation.

When children attend any sports activity it becomes a family commitment, parent’s chauffeur them to and fro and often wait whilst the activities are taking place. This is seen as an opportunity to also introduce young parents to golf through family fun competitions etc.

Unless Golf Clubs can attract a younger membership the long term future of golf is at risk.

We ask all members to support Tony in his efforts to develop the junior activities and if you feel you can (offer physical support please contact Tony.

## **BALCONY**

There has been lots of discussion and heated debate within the Board regards the provision of a new extended balcony resulting in architect drawings which would provide refurbishment of the existing balcony and move seamlessly onto an extended balcony area effectively doubling the floor space. We have engaged the services of a Planning Consultant (*the consultant that managed the housing development & course reconfiguration planning application*). To process the application with Bury M.B.C.

The dimensions of the new balcony area would allow a swing room etc. to be constructed below the at a later date.

In order to achieve this would mean resubmitting plans to the local authority at a later date.

The Board now have a clearer vision of what will be required to be built under the balcony extension which will include a swing room for members and junior section changing facilities.

The planning has been delayed whilst the architect develops plans for the complete building designed in a manner which will allow us to make a single application for planning approval for the full extension but staged to be completed in two phases.

Stage 1 – the balcony extension

Stage 2 – The swing room & Junior Facilities.

In reality there will be three phases, the two indicated above which require full planning approval and a preliminary stage being the refurbishment element of the existing balcony which will:

- Be an integral part of the architects plans for the completed project
- Ensure we have an attractive and useable balcony for the start of the new seas

This has inevitably created some delays but the long term future of the club is paramount.

All of these plans are subject to funding availability which will dictate the timing of each phase.

## **SEEKING GRANTS**

The capital gained from the sale of the land has been used as a base for putting the club on a sound footing however if we are to avoid dipping into the capital sum secured for the long term future of the club we must attract more business through increased memberships and trading activities.

Another source of revenue that the club has not explored is the various grants schemes available to develop sport and recreational activities.

A sub group being led by Lois Harris is currently investigating the range of grants we may be able to tap into through grant applications,

## **LINKS WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

Traditionally the Club has been very inward looking and not reached out to the wider local community. We are sometimes known as the “hidden gem” and almost proud of it.

The Golf Club/Course is a significant sporting and recreational asset for the local community but we have in the past failed to benefit from goodwill available to support our activities.

Members of the Board are now creating links with Council Members such as our local councillors, Council officers connected with sporting development etc. as well as community groups and local schools.

Our traditional “inward looking policies” has seen the club steadily decline and if we are to develop and strengthen the club we have to reach out to these outside agencies for help and support.

## GRANTS TREES

Following recent meetings with local Councillors we have been successful in receiving a grant to plant 300 trees from the "City of Trees" a movement set up to reinvigorate Greater Manchester's landscape by restoring underused, unloved woodland. The approach, on our behalf was made by local councillor Alan Quin

The planting of these trees will assist in our requirement from the Environment agency to plant several hundred trees as part of the Singleton Brook works.

It demonstrates that help and assistance is out there if we make the appropriate approaches.

## BUGGY PATHS

The development of the new course has resulted in some new internal pathways being constructed.

We are all getting familiar with the increased use of buggy's on the course which often are the only means some of our members with physical disabilities can continue to enjoy the sport.

The course has a hilly terrain and this is often given for new members not joining and sometimes visitors and societies not booking the course.

The Board consider that if we could now extend the buggy paths around the course this could help retain our ageing membership and also attract new members and visitors.

The proposed programme of buggy path development will be expensive and certainly not available through our current funds or income streams.

The Grants sub group are developing a bid through the Community Assets Fund for an initial grant to set the programme in motion.

We have no indication of whether the grant will be successful but we are confident that this approach will eventually see the developments we want for the club to be achieved,

Details of our proposed buggy path scheme will be published in a later edition of the Club Magazine.

## TREES & THE FORESTRY COMMISSION

Every member will be aware of the number of trees that have been felled over the period of the course reconstruction and have their own personal views on this emotive activity.

Tree felling was not included within the Course Contract and was managed by our greens staff.

It fell into three categories:

- Trees required to be felled to clear the land for the course extensions – *the new field, the banking of the Singleton Brook and the clearance up the side of the first fairway to create the new eighteenth hole*

- Trees that were felled around the course perimeter for safety reasons and as a result of *neighbours requests for removal to allow* sunlight into their premises. *In these cases the costs are passed on to the householder or sometimes shared to retain good neighbour relations.*
- Trees, particularly around the clubhouse, which were removed simply to enhance the views of and from the clubhouse.

To ensure that we remained within the law with regards tree management we contracted specialist consultants to complete a tree survey to support any claims of unlawful tree removals.

We were prepared for complaints from neighbours and members of the public which eventually came in the form of a visit from an officer from the Forestry Commission.

Following a full inspection of the course accompanied by Chris the Inspector gave us a clean bill of health and complimented us on our environmental plans such as creation of havens for wild life, bird boxes and beehives and plans for the planting of new trees to replace those removed in addition to those required by our planning conditions.

## OUTSTANDING PROJECTS

We are now reaching the stage that funding from the land sale is becoming exhausted and the Board are at the stage where every project has to be considered carefully and one or two may have to be delayed until our income increases and allows for the investment.

The other option is to dip into the capital reserves that the Board invested to secure the long term future of the club but they are very reluctant to take this approach as we have all seen clubs locally who have overspent and are now in financial difficulties.

The outstanding projects include those mentioned earlier including Junior Room / Swing Room, Balcony Extension, Roof Replacement, Kitchen refurbishment etc. but also a myriad of minor jobs which in total can become a major issue.

These include items such as

- Filling of Bunkers
- Renovating/providing pathways not included in the contract
- Major Drains issue under main car park
- Trees purchase & planting as required under Environment Depart planning approval
- Car Park Remarking
- Provision of new fencing
- Implications of potential action by Bury MBC to construct a new footpath along the 7<sup>th</sup> Fairway.

The Board will carefully consider all spending commitments over the next few months and comply with their legal responsibility to ensure the financial management of the club is managed carefully and responsibly.

