

WESTPORT GOLF CLUB

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SITE VISIT: 26 January 2017

PRESENT: Mr. Michael Reddington, Grounds Chairman
Mr. Jim Keane, Course Committee
Mr. Eugene Lavelle, Course Committee
Mr. John Kavanagh, Course Committee
Mr. Pat Fadden, Head Greenkeeper
Mr. Eddie Connaughton, Agronomist.

INTRODUCTION:

I carried out a course inspection on 26 January 2017 to assess conditions present and to provide a report on future maintenance practices. Prior to the inspection I met with the grounds committee for a discussion on the objectives the club wish to achieve for the course and how I can direct an agronomic management programme to achieve these objectives. We had a full discussion on all aspects of course maintenance, but the condition and management of greens took priority. I was asked to review all aspects of the course and draw up a plan that can be implemented by the grounds staff and supported by the grounds committee and club council.

Following our discussions I inspected the course with Pat Fadden and below are my observations, comments and recommendations for the immediate spring period. I noted to the committee that I would focus on course maintenance issues during this visit, and other areas of course management could be dealt with in subsequent visits during the year.

Greens:

The greens are dominated with the *Poa Annua* (Annual Meadowgrass) grass species, which is very common on most parkland course around Ireland. However, this is not necessarily a negative as *Poa* can be maintained to produce good putting surfaces throughout the year, while it peaks in performance through the main golfing season as growth and weather conditions dictate. Unfortunately, the greens had suffered from an outbreak of *Fusarium* disease over the Christmas period and extensive scarring was evident during my inspection and this occurred even after the application of a fungicide to prevent the outbreak.

Poa is susceptible to Fusarium in the autumn /winter period and it has to be treated with full preventative fungicide applications on a 21-27 day schedule to avoid scarring. Use of such fungicides can avoid the scarring currently present but, as the fungus is ever present in the soil, an outbreak can occur if the fungicide applied does not kill the fungus. I would comment that the rate of application of fungicide used before Christmas was not strong enough to contain the fungus attack that took place, even though it was applied at label recommended rates. On a more positive note, Fusarium only affects the leaf of the grass and once growth commences in the spring the plant recovers to full health again. Also, the Poa species is quickest at recovering growth once the soil temperatures rise to produce growth.

The greens profiles are dominated with old soil that has a surface 4-5 inch layer of sand topdressing and fibre/thatch intermingling layers. This is a result of successive years of carrying out aeration and sand topdressing which ensure the profiles drain down to a reasonable standard after rainfall. The 7th, 8th, 13th & 18th are sand based greens, and while two of these were seeded, 8th & 18th, and the other two were turfed with native sod, they all now have the same fine textured Poa present on all the greens. However, the upper profiles of these newer greens have less fibre /thatch layers when compared with the older greens.

There is a layer of fibre/ thatch present on all greens that must be managed to reduce the impact on the surface of the greens. The main objective of greens management is to produce firm, smooth surfaces where the golf ball will run true at a reasonable pace over the surface. Excess fibre /thatch in the upper profile of the greens will result in soft, uneven putting surfaces. The main recommendations for managing these greens will be as follows:

- Hollow coring to remove fibre /thatch, this should be a minimum of once per year. Schedule this for late summer /early autumn this year as the Fusarium scars need to heal this spring.
- Deep spring scarifying /verti-cutting to remove the fibre that is just below the grass canopy. Verti-cutting then monthly during the growing season.
- Frequent light sand topdressing must be carried out throughout the growing season on a 14 day schedule. This will dilute the exiting fibre and produce firmer greens once the layer starts to accumulate.
- Micro-solid tining in February / March with monthly hydro-jetting for the summer period.

I will follow up with nutritional /fertiliser recommendations at a later stage but I did advise an application of Seaweed liquid plus Nitrogen during February / March to help fill in the

scars from the *Fusarium* damage. The important spring management is to keep surface disturbance to a minimum as the greens have to

recover growth, and if a cold spring occurs this could be a slow process. I also recommend rolling the greens when the surfaces are dry to keep them smooth, rather than cutting during the months of February and March. Only cut at 4 mm when there is grass to be removed.

Greens Surrounds/ Approaches / Fairways:

The main goal on these areas is to improve the method of cutting and presentation and to eliminate weeds. The fairways are being cut too low for this time of year; I would favour a cutting height of $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch during the winter months. Low cutting, even during the summer, encourages weeds to persist if they are not being eliminated with herbicides. A suitable fertiliser and herbicide programme will be put in place for the elimination of weeds during 2017, but my experience is that a minimum of three applications will be needed at this course.

The method of cutting and presentation will also need adjusting and I recommend the following programmes taking into account the labour resources here at the club.

- Fairway cutting at $\frac{3}{4}$ inch with new shaping and widths to be agreed at a later date. Some fairways like the 7th and 10th are much too narrow (i.e. 10th is 13 yards wide in places) in my opinion.
- Use a semi-rough cut around the greens only and this should be 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.
- Rough should be cut at a maximum of 2 inches during the summer with one width cut around each fairway on a Friday to avoid heavy grass interfacing with the fairway over the weekends.

Note: All of this can be discussed further at my next course visit.

There are some drainage issues that need immediate attention on the 10th and I recommended hollow coring the wet area as soon as possible with 5/8 inch tines, remove the cores and topdress with clean, gritty sand. There is a layer of thatch on this fairway and it must be reduced with successive coring and sand topdressing. The right side of the 8th fairway is also a problem and may need a drainage system to be installed later in the year. In the short term, topdress when possible with the gritty sand and mole plough when the area dries up. I would also favour cutting the grass down to green surround or fairway height as soon as a machine can travel in the area.

Finally, where wet areas are present on fairways, a top dressing programme must be commenced to allow the water percolate through the surface thatch that has developed over the years.

Tees:

The tees will also need a more detailed management programme to firm up the surfaces and remove the weeds. The following programme should be commenced:

- Spring hollow coring with 5/8 inch tines and remove the cores.
- Topdress with Darcy sand afterwards to fill holes and level surfaces.
- Commence a fertilising and herbicide programme in the spring to produce better overall surfaces.

The back tees on the 9th are particularly bad with moss /algae etc. I would recommend playing these tees for the remainder of the winter and make the hole a par 4 if players think it is too long. In this way the moss /algae will be disturbed and a reduction will be noticeable. A heavy hollow coring with 5/8 inch tines and sand dressings with the gritty sand should firm up the surfaces after two treatments. This will also give the regular tee a rest before the main golfing season.

Bunkers:

All the bunkers should have the sand re-distributed from the back /entrance to the bunker towards the front /greenside so that the floor of the bunker is falling away from the green rather than towards the green. Redefining all the edges would also be necessary before the start of the golfing season.

Conclusion:

I have concentrated the bulk of this report on the greens management, and commented on the other area of the course in general terms which will form the foundation of my course management objectives. I will develop these on my next visit and make more specific recommendations as necessary. I am available by phone for any queries that may arise before then.

***Eddie B. Connaughton, B.Sc.
Agronomist.***