

CHESTER-LE-STREET GOLF CLUB

Course Bulletin – September 2016

1. Activities since May

The majority of the tree thinning in the Haughs and Castle fields has now been completed and the finer mulching is being carried out prior to seeding. In addition to this many areas, especially in the Haughs, have been treated with weed control.

Work has commenced on the tree thinning in the top field. This is expected to be completed before the end of September.

2. Plans for Autumn 2016

We are now planning the work which will deliver the enhancements to holes 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, and 14. The construction work will be in two stages:

26th September for 5 days:

We have a contractor scheduled to be on site during this week. The main focus of the work will be two new ditches which will be located LHS of the eleventh hole and RHS of the twelfth hole. The 2 greenside bunkers on the twelfth hole will also be reconfigured during this week, plus other features if time and weather allow.

It will be necessary to use the winter green on the 12th hole during this work.

9th to 25th November:

The major construction of the remaining 5 holes in phase one is scheduled for this period.

The new features are detailed in the plans we have made available in the club house and on the club web site. There are some dramatic enhancements in store for these holes so you may like to refresh your memory by reviewing Ken Moodie's plan.

We may use two holes in the practice area instead of the regular 13th and 14th holes over the construction and settling down period.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. The health and safety issues arising from the removal of trees previously providing protection from wayward shots. What mitigation is planned?

A1. There are different views on this, held by various bodies throughout the game. One view is that golf in general is safer with fewer trees because the golfer playing the shot can see players on adjacent holes and the players on adjacent holes have more chance of seeing someone as they strike the ball. Having said that, the strategy is to maintain a screen between holes with fewer trees – which will now be allowed to grow to their true potential. This was explained at the last meeting, e.g. between 9th tee and 4th fairway there is still a screen (of the same height) created by the careful selection of trees for removal.

Q2. The cost in extending the mortgage term. No such thing as free money! How much more is it going to cost?

A2. We are still in discussion with the bank to arrive at the best terms. At the meeting we talked about phase I only – i.e. holes 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14. Our main, stated, aim, is to fund the first phase without adding to the costs which members have to meet, i.e. the monthly costs borne by the club will not rise. Obviously this means the money has to be found in another way. Our view for some time is that we should use some of the equity in the clubhouse. As stated at the meeting, we currently owe circa 112k on the mortgage. The last time the building was valued, it was in excess of 400k. This was several years ago and we, and the bank, expect the value will have increased (we are going to commission a new valuation for completeness). Given the above, we feel it is unfair that current members bear the full cost of the mortgage over the remaining tenure of 8 years, when the building will be around for 50 years or more, certainly for the remaining term of the lease – 32 years or so. Consequently we feel it is reasonable to use the equity to improve our one true asset, which is the course itself. It will then become something which will be of benefit to both current members and future generations. We can't, at this stage, be precise about the total cost of the loan. It's a bit of a moving feast, witness the recent reduction in the base rate by the Bank of England. It will obviously increase the term – but not, I repeat, the monthly running costs. We are taking this step because of the delay in the VAT refund we are due from HMRC. When the latter is received, it will be used to restore strength to the balance sheet and to our contingency.

I would like to say that the finance committee and the full GP were unanimous in agreeing to consider loan options from the bank but as you would expect, we will continue to explore other avenues of funding.

Q3. The quality of future and current bunkers and tee boxes and their maintenance. What is different about the design and construction of these "new" features and why have the current bunkers not been "upgraded" to the same design?

A3. This is the key area of the design and the one which is intended to bring together the three currently-diverse parts of the course. The bunkers will be the main features in creating the course strategy. You are encouraged to read pages 11 through 20 of Ken Moodie's plan (3 copies are available in the club house). In addition to the detail contained there I would like to add:

There will be 23 new bunkers.

There will be **37** remodelled or reshaped bunkers.

There will be 12 bunkers removed (many of which will be replaced by mounding)

The bunkers will vary in height between 0.5 metre and 1.5 metre!

As part of the works we will be addressing many of the areas of poor drainage, some of which are associated with bunkers and green surrounds.

One thing I feel some members may have missed is that, even the bunkers not marked for major surgery, will have their approaches lowered, i.e. the errant ball will find its way into the bunker much more easily, rather than stopping short.

As Ken explained at the presentation of the design, the back nine holes only have 2 drive bunkers and they are both on the same hole (11). The new design addresses this and redistributes the bunkers between the 18 holes of the course. Column 2 of the charts on pages 12 and 13 of the plan inform very well on this point.

Q4. The effect on the standard scratch of the course resulting from the course changes. If penal features are removed how can the course be anything but easier?

A4. The intention is to make the course fairer and more strategic and to improve the pace of play. There are many features which will protect the course, including but not limited to:

- the bunker strategy above
- the various mounding
- the increase in yardage to some holes
- the extension to four greens which will provide new areas for tight pin positions
- the reshaping of fairways

As I said in the last bulletin, for a time some holes may appear as if they will be easier to play but this will be addressed with the overall completion of the project.

In the monitoring of scoring I have so far carried out, there is no evidence that the scoring has come down.

I have monitored both the men's and ladies' scoring in competitions over June, July for last year and the current year and, though the scoring on some holes differs, the average for the holes 4 through 9 is precisely the same.

We intend to carry out further analysis as work progresses but anticipate that the course will not be easier following the work this autumn and when the 2017 scores reflect the dramatic features which are scheduled on the 6 holes which make up phase I. The course will be challenging, strategic, and enjoyable.

C Henderson

Secretary

On behalf of GP Committee