

On the Course

Dear Member,

Welcome to the first edition of 'On the Course'. We intend to make this a regular publication to keep you in touch with news and developments to do with the course.

The 2019 Course Committee is: Derek Quilligan (Chairman); Jimmy Doyle (Captain); Maefil McDermott (Lady Captain); Mary Duane; Brian O'Connor and Mark Harrington (Course Superintendent).

Our goals this year are for our tees, fairways, greens and practice facilities to be of the highest possible standard and that the overall appearance of the course and surrounds is enhanced. By the summer of 2020, when work on the back 9 bunkers has been completed, **we want the course to be in pristine condition and constantly praised by members and guests.**

The following sets out our plan to deliver these goals.

Agronomists Report

Last year Hermitage employed agronomists to carry out a review of all aspects of our course. Working with Course Superintendent Mark, they made several recommendations to improve the quality of the course.

Budget permitting it's our intention to carry out these recommendations over the next few months or provide explanation as to why work in a specific area is not required or not appropriate.

Arboriculturalist Report

The last time we had a full inventory of our tree population was in 2007. This included a condition assessment and remediation plan on all vulnerable trees. Since then we've lost many trees, carried out necessary repair work on others and planted 150 new native deciduous trees.

We will seek Administrative Committee approval for a new assessment to be done when we've obtained quotes from specialist firms.

A lot done.....

You'll be aware of the damage done to the course last year due to the unprecedented weather conditions. Happily, most of the bare areas caused by drought and high temperatures have recovered following overseeding with drought tolerant grass species, aeration and fertilisation.

Some localised areas didn't recover as the dieback was too severe. It was decided that laying imported sod was the best option to remediate these areas. The priority was to reinstate green surrounds and tees first, before completing work on the fairways. We're delighted to report that this work has now been completed successfully.

In addition to this remediation work, Mark and his team have also:

- Installed new steps at the 2nd, 3rd, Winter 10th, 14th and 16th tees.
- Cleaned up the gorse hill on the 10th removing unwanted trees and bushes growing through the gorse and blocking the view to the hole.
- Planted Winter and Spring flowers around the clubhouse and 1st tee area.
- Removed stone contamination as well as reshaping and adding new sand to the 12th and 14th bunkers.
- Installed new drinking fountains at the 7th and 14th holes.
- Carried out major improvement works to the area in front of the 5th tee, which included:
 - Installing new automatic irrigation system.
 - Laying new sods on a soil compost mix.
 - Removing tree roots close to the surface.
 - Cutting down low hanging branches blocking tee shots.
- Removed 14 poplar trees affecting the 8th fairway.
- Planted pyramid yew trees at exits along the 13th path.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Mark and his team for all their great work throughout the winter months and acknowledge the direction given by Tony Gillen and last year's Course Committee.

More to do.....

Topdressing Greens

We will be topdressing and scarifying greens with sand in February when weather conditions are right. Work will take a day for each 9 and temporary greens will in use. While it's appreciated that this is a source of frustration it's an essential part of green management that derives many benefits, including:

- **Improved smoothness:** voids exist within the turf canopy between turf grass leaves and stems, causing inconsistent ball roll. Sand topdressing helps fill in these voids to provide a smoother and truer putting surface.
- **Thatch dilution:** A layer of organic debris can build up and cause mower scalping and localised dry patch. Thatch is diluted by verti cutting and topdressing to maintain good turf quality.
- **Increased firmness:** Turf produces organic matter in the upper rootzone and creates soft, spongy playing conditions. Regular sand topdressing, along with core aeration, improves surface firmness and resilience.
- **Improved rootzone:** Sand drains well and resists soil compaction. The accumulation of sand from multiple topdressing over many years improves drainage and soil physical properties. Also having drier green surfaces protects from winter damage.

Like other top courses regular topdressing of greens has been normal practice in Hermitage. If weather and golf schedules permitted greens would be top dressed with sand every 10-14 days. Members may have noticed topdressing more in recent times which is due to the

unusually mild dry conditions at the start of January, when the opportunity was taken to spread more sand.

2nd Green

The 2nd green has drainage problems due to poor design and the quality of the grass has suffered as a result. The problem is mainly at the front left of the green where the collar and green surround is higher than the green itself. This restricts the flow of water off the green creating a pool. The solution is to reduce the height of the surround to create sufficient fall to allow water flow off the green. Unfortunately, it has been necessary to close the green for a week from Monday 28th of January to facilitate this work.

Irrigation Work at the 2nd and 8th

Some fairways suffer more than others in dry weather conditions due to poor irrigation. Irrigation channels will be dug on the 2nd and 8th fairways in the next week or so which will improve ground conditions on these worst affected fairways.

9th Hole

In light of golf's new rules, we've decided to make the area of trees to the right of the 9th fairway a 'Penalty Area' and will install red stakes here shortly. The stakes will start at the 9th tee and run almost the full length of the fairway.

12th Tee

We will replace the sleeper wall in front of the men's 12th tee box with new sleepers as the existing sleepers have rotted and are in danger of collapsing. This tee will be closed for a short time while the work is being done.

14th Tee

We will remove trees and bushes to the right of the 14th tee and replace them with a beech hedge. The 14th tee box is suffering because of the trees and it's difficult for grass to grow at the front of the tee box. This work will tidy up the area generally and in time make it more difficult for trespassers to gain entry here.

18th Tee (Ladies)

The Ladies 18th tee is small and uneven and below an acceptable standard. Work to upgrade it to the same level as the new 16th tee has begun.

18th Tee (Men's)

It can be difficult for people driving out of the club to see golfers on the men's blue and white tees due to branches of a tree in the area. The branches concerned have been cut back as much as possible without being detrimental to the tree's health.

Fairways and Course Closure

Overseeding of fairways will be carried out all day Monday 15th April and the morning of Tuesday the 16th April. The course will be closed during these times.

Short Game Practice Area & New Chipping Green

Work to construct a new chipping green, between the chipping green at the 18th green and the air compressor shoe cleaners, has begun.

We hope the new green will be ready for use in May. The green's surface will be created using hollow tine extracts from the practice putting and chipping greens and the summer 10th green.

To facilitate practice in this area, golfers will in future exit the course from the back of the 18th green. We will move the air compressor shoe cleaners down the path close to the practice net and construct a new markers hut in this area.

For health and safety reasons there will be limited access to the existing chipping greens while work is underway.

Longer Game Practice Area

We expect to take delivery of the new practice bay shelter in the second week of March. Weather permitting the installation work, including the connection of power and water, should be completed before St Patrick's Day.

Back 9 Bunkers

You'll have seen the email inviting you to a consultation evening on Tuesday 19th February. The meeting will give you an opportunity to express your view on the plan. We would remind that whilst all views will be considered, the final decision on all matters relating to the project will rest with the Administrative Committee.

Work on the bunkers will begin on Monday 14th October and should be finished and fully opened by the 1st May 2020. Temporary greens will be in use during the construction period and we will do our best to ensure these greens are as good as possible.

How you can help improve the course

In their report the agronomists said *"Hermitage's greens were without exception the finest textured Poa annua var. reptans (Perennial, Annual Meadow Grass) greens we have observed in Ireland. This very unique biotype of annual meadow grass which for generations has been conditioned to a very high standard, through leaf texture refinement and cultural practices. Impressive putting surfaces are enjoyed at Hermitage because of this"*.

However, they went on to say *"during our inspection we repaired countless amounts of pitch marks, which is to some degree understandable, as it was the day after weekend play, but something that should be noted with the players."*

So please remember the three R's:

- Repair your pitch marks;
- Replace your divots;
- Rake the bunker

Also, please:

- Follow directional signs
- Avoid driving a buggy or wheeling a trolley too close to greens and tees

- Replace ropes and signs removed to play a shot. There have been occasions recently when ropes haven't been replaced and following groups have walked over newly laid sod and other protected areas.

Consider lightening your load.

- Do you need a full set of clubs at this time of year?
- Do you need to carry all the golf balls you have in your bag?
- Why not consider carrying your bag and using only a half set of clubs?

Finally, we welcome any suggestions or queries you might have about the course. Feel free to email derek.quilligan@yahoo.co.uk or leave a note behind the bar. All your comments will be raised with Mark and the Committee, and we will respond to you as soon as we can.