

## 2015 Members' Survey - Response to Members' Comments The Golf Course

This communication addresses itself principally to the comments made in the 2015 Members' survey. In common with other areas of the Club's facilities and activities, all comments have been studied and considered. Amongst these, the course unsurprisingly attracts the most interest.

It is clearly also the case that, since taking the members' survey input, much has ensued; the course layout has been altered, two new holes have been introduced and we have experienced abnormally high and late 2016 "spring growth" rates. Our course is in a constant state of development and evolution and, therefore, at the conclusion of this communication you will find references and information that take us beyond the survey into forward-looking actions and proposals. It is inevitable, however, that some actions that you will find outlined below address not only the survey comments but also the course conditions as they have prevailed subsequently.

### Survey Statistics

The statistics of the survey revealed the following:

- 1) Greens

Very Poor to Average:	2.1%
Good:	30.0%
Excellent:	67.9%
  
- 2) Tees

Very Poor to Poor:	5.8%
Average:	25.4%
Good:	47.1%
Excellent:	21.7%
  
- 3) Fairways

Very Poor to Average:	3.9%
Good:	45.4%
Excellent:	50.7%
  
- 4) Bunkers

Very Poor:	7.9%	
Poor:	22.5%	
Average:	4	3.9%
Good:	22.1%	
Excellent:	3.6%	
  
- 5) Practice Area

Very Poor:	5.4%
Poor:	23.1%
Average:	47.9%
Good:	21.8%
Excellent:	1.8%

6) <u>Practice Green</u>	
Very Poor to Poor:	13.2%
Average:	45.0%
Good:	38.6%
Excellent:	3.2%
7) <u>Practice Nets</u>	
Very Poor:	7.9%
Poor:	27.9%
Average:	47.1%
Good:	16.4%
Excellent:	0.7%
8) <u>Golf Academy</u>	
Very Poor to Average:	9.3%
Good:	48.9%
Excellent:	41.8%

We have considered and reviewed some 700 comments submitted by members who completed the 2015 survey. Of these 700, some 225 were positive affirmations of satisfaction, 25 were neutral and 450 offered criticism and suggestions. Very many of the comments replicated the same or similar views.

#### Responses to Survey Comments on rated areas

##### 1) Greens

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the greens, while the single-most important and repeated comment/criticism related to their firmness and receptiveness. Such comments have been renewed in 2016. There are a number of key factors and attributes relating to greens:

- A. They must be kept free from disease.
- B. They should present true-running surfaces for putting at a consistent level across all 18 holes.
- C. They should be as receptive as possible to a well-flighted ball.
- D. They should drain well under the duress of steady rainfall.

While the firmness of greens can to an extent be altered by additional watering, the advice of the Club's consultant agronomist is to be aware that over-watering promotes disease. With respect to drainage, L&CGC applies somewhat less top-dressing per annum than neighbouring courses and has future application rates under review. There is also a school of thought that suggests that the route to more receptive greens is to permit a degree of "thatching" of the grasses. The use of the greens "iron" has little or no impact upon receptiveness but is used to obtain consistency across the surface.

#### Action

*We consider A. & B. to be priorities while seeking to optimise and improve attributes C. & D. We plan therefore to purchase or hire an "impact meter" and regularly to record and monitor the receptiveness or "give" in our greens' surface. Our agronomist*

***strongly advocates this approach as a means to making careful and progressive adjustments to our maintenance and development regimes.***

## 2) Tees

The survey comments highlighted that a number of our tees are uneven and in need of attention. Our new tees on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes provide now good examples of the standards that members would like to see.

### **Action**

***Tee renewal and improvement will be included as an important part of the 5 Year Plan for the course which will also address the size and state of our 8<sup>th</sup> tee.***

A number of references were made by respondents to the narrowness of the tee boxes. The greens staff has in recent times operated a system of rotating narrower tee boxes as a means to controlling damage and regrowth.

### **Action**

***We will trial wider/full width tee boxes and monitor the results.***

## 3) Fairways (and Carries)

96% of responding members rate the fairways as either good or excellent and very few comments were recorded. However, there was a reference in the survey to the drainage lines across the fairways and the heavy rainfall in more recent months has highlighted one or two particularly problematic areas. More recently there have also been some comments or enquiries made about the width of fairways and the carries from tee to fairway on some holes.

### **Action**

***Topping off of drainage lines will be prioritised in the “winter programme” and the damaged areas will be excavated and repaired.***

***The fairway widths and carries will be measured and specified in the new 5 Year Plan for the course which will take into account the driving distances of the Club’s categories and sections of golfers. Some early adjustments to carries are planned to address immediate needs.***

## 4) Bunkers

Bunkers attracted a significant number of survey comments with only 25.7% of respondents awarding them a “good” or “excellent” rating. Being close to the completion of a 3 year programme of bunker renovations, it is important that the issues are well understood and are addressed. The criticisms received split broadly into three categories:

- Consistency
- Sand quality
- Design

When considering consistency it should be noted that all bunkers now have the same sub-surface drainage design and that the same sand-type is employed in all bunkers. The lack of consistency therefore points towards variable sand depths and variable levels of raking. The sand used in our bunkers is the variety preferred by members who trialled three varieties and it is, in fact, the most expensive of the varieties considered. It also performs optimally to avoid wind and rain erosion. (The Club expends £5,000 per annum on top-up sand.) It is not definitively clear whether this variety performs better or worse than other varieties

after consistent or heavy rainfall. In terms of design, there are no immediate plans to change any bunker topography. Any issues relating to golf balls coming to rest close to the margins rather than being gathered into the more central areas of the sand must necessarily therefore be addressed by bunker preparation.

**Action**

***The remaining 3 or 4 bunkers are to be brought to the same sub-surface design standard.***

***Priority will be given to the establishment of a new raking regime and to monitoring and adjusting sand depths to be consistent across the course. Mechanical raking machine options will be trialled.***

***We will again arrange trials of different sand types and/or mixtures and propose to use the practice bunker, supervised by the Club's Pro, for this purpose.***

5) 6) 7) & 8) **Practice Facilities**

With the exception of the Academy, which is operated and maintained by the Club Pro, all of the Club's practice facilities received ratings which indicate that attention is needed. Criticisms principally covered the following:

- Quality of Golf Lane practice field and its remoteness from the Clubhouse
- The quality of the driving net mats
- The absence of adequate pitching, chipping practice areas
- Lack of driving range

It is clear that the remoteness of the practice field, which is leased and not owned, is not ideal. Furthermore, that remoteness and the attendant lack of security makes it impractical significantly to develop the site with additional facilities that would be liable to vandalism or theft. However, following the replacement of the 18<sup>th</sup> hole, further and new options can be considered for more on site facilities.

**Action**

***A more rigorous maintenance and cutting regime is now in place for the practice field. The distance signs will be modified from metres to yards! New teeing frames and mats will be installed in the area to provide all-weather surfaces.***

***The driving net mats will be replaced and the option of two further nets in the vicinity of the academy is under consideration.***

***Options of using more on-site area for pitching & chipping practice are under review along with the usage of the reconstituted old 18<sup>th</sup> green. When proposals are clearer these will be shared with members and become part of the 5 Year Course Plan.***

## Responses to Other Course-Related Survey Comments

The Members' Survey provided opportunities to register comments on course layout, appearance, detailing and strategy and amongst these the design and extent of the rough attracted most attention.

The Club plans to hold a review with members later in the year to consider and to exchange opinions on the new arrangement and playing order of the 18 holes that was introduced in May this year. Also under consideration is the strategy for the course; in other words, how should it present itself to and best accommodate members and visitors of all and varying abilities? In the meantime, other course-related comments are addressed below.

### 1. Rough

“Rough” is taken to refer to the different categories; 1<sup>st</sup> Cut, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cut and Conservation. While the Club's intention has been to maintain all three categories to certain prescribed standards, it has proved difficult in the 2016 season consistently to achieve these standards. Major factors have been the above average spring growth rates, which were sustained well into the current playing season, a number of unpredictable machinery failures and adequate peak-time resources. The high growth rates also led to more mown grasses lying on the surface than would ideally be the case. Members' comments on the rough raised the following issues:

- Height of all cuts of rough has led to more difficulty in locating balls and so has slowed up play
- Areas of conservation rough are too extensive and too lush
- Is conservation rough necessary in wooded areas in which trees are already a potential penalty?

### Action

*1<sup>st</sup> Cut rough is designated to be mowed to 30mm height. Until recently our cutting equipment has been unable to reach this height. Recent cutter modifications have provided more success and approximately this height will be maintained ongoing.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Cut rough will be maintained at 50mm height and the improved cutting at or close to 30mm will provide clearer definition and gradations from fairway to 2<sup>nd</sup> Cut.*

*It continues to be the objective to achieve deep but thin and wispy conservation rough. However, this will take time as the areas need to be progressively starved of nutrients by the removal of cuttings each year when the rough is cut back. To accelerate the process the Club will trial chemical applications to achieve the same result. A programme has begun to reduce certain areas of conservation rough from some wooded areas and more particularly from areas which can be reached from, but not be seen from, the tees. The extent of conservation rough will be kept under review.*

### 2. Course Detailing and Appearance

There is a wide range of commentary from members, including some thoughtful suggestions. They can be grouped as follows:

- Lack of attention to areas surrounding but not part of the course. Pay more attention to beds, pots, hedges, paving, car park borders
- Improve initial impressions on entering the course gateway and clubhouse
- Better maintenance of course pathways & steps. Cups for broken tees.

- Removal of dead growth & failed trees
- Repair damage more quickly
- Define GUR clearly and unequivocally
- More and better signage
- New Shoe and Trolley compressed air cleaner
- Introduce more colour, interest & wow factor
- Improve the appearance and feature of the ponds, particularly on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- On course drinking fountain and toilet facilities
- Ball cleaners that work and are kept filled

### **Action**

***A new shoe cleaner has subsequently been purchased and a three year programme of on-course path renovations and replacements is underway.***

***It is a requirement that our greens staff take due care of playing conditions on the course with attention to GUR, hedge and other trimming/strimming (e.g. around greens and sprinkler heads) and roping-off. Potential changes and additions to the feature content of the course will be considered as part of the 5 Year course plan to be shared with members later this year.***

***As regards the proper maintenance and attractiveness of areas surrounding the car parks, clubhouse and course approaches, there is very limited greens resource to apply to these activities. However, the Club recognises that improvement is necessary. This will be considered together with other potential improvements to the clubhouse facilities with a view to assessing the investment needs and resources required.***

### **Next Steps**

As outlined in the introduction to this communication and as evidenced in the survey data, L&CGC has a fine golf course today but has ample scope to be forward looking and to improve the satisfaction of its members. While it may present difficulties to develop a course that satisfies equally the single-figure and high handicap golfer, we believe there can be strategic changes to carries, rough and fairway widths (at shorter and longer yardages) to maintain appropriate challenges for both. The health, consistency and excellence of all of the playing surfaces from tee to green, including bunkers, is of paramount importance to the Club's ongoing success.

The Greens Team and the Club's management will prepare a new 5 Year Plan which will define the parameters, measurements and work programmes to be pursued. This Plan will also provide a clear indication of the resources and investment required.

The Plan must also contain the established and agreed course layout and order of play of the holes.

We look forward to taking members' views on the new course layout and to sharing the key elements of the 5 Year Plan at a forthcoming meeting before the end of this year.

*Greens Committee July 2016*