

# THE GOLF CLUB SECRETARY

Briefing and practical advice for golf club administrators

## Out of the Rough

Secretary/managers at the top of their game pass on their experiences.

**Scott Patience** is a former PGA professional and golf club general manager who now runs his own business, SPatience Golf Consultancy.



Scott Patience

Scott was introduced to the game by his father, a talented golfer himself, at the age of ten, before the family moved south where they became members of Wentworth. Scott was off a 2 handicap when he joined Bernard Gallacher (who was Ryder Cup Captain at the time) and became a PGA professional. After becoming PGA qualified, he had a spell at Quinta do Lago before joining Worpleston as acting head professional under Jim Christine, who moved to the secretary/pro role; this gave Scott his first taste of the crossover to management before he became head professional at The Celtic Manor Resort in 2000, where he was brought in to launch the inaugural Wales Open and was involved in the 2010 Ryder Cup bid.

He then returned to the south-east at Foxhills, where he became general manager of the Fox Shop business and director of coaching before moving into his first full management role in 2009 at Windlesham as the club's operations manager. "I knew that the industry was changing," Scott says, "and it was just at the time of the recession. A number of pro shops were moving in-house and there were fewer head pro opportunities. I'd always enjoyed the management side as well as the golf and took the opportunity to move into a new role as golf operations manager at Windlesham."

His first general manager's role came in 2013 at Reigate Heath, a stunning nine-hole club in Surrey, before a move to West Surrey Golf Club in 2016, which then led on to him launching his consultancy business six and a half years ago. Since then he has had the opportunity to work with nearly 20 different clubs and clients.

### What did you find the most challenging aspects of being a general manager?

Every club is very similar, but different. When I started, I found managing up as well as down was the real trick. Some clubs have a strong governance structure and provide a very clear remit of where they want their club to go, while others benefit from support to determine their strategy. Clubs sometimes lose focus on what they're a good at, so good governance and a clear vision make it much easier for the team. When I first started, Bob Williams, former CEO of GCMA, told me, "It's a lonely role but you're always in demand." On reflection, I realised these were wise words.

In a management role, the biggest challenge is the strength of the governance structure and stable long-term planning. By the nature of the democracy in clubs, a new chair or director can come in and change the dynamic and direction quickly. As a manager you need to balance this while keeping the club

## Quote OF THE MONTH

"Every golfer has a little monster in him. It's just that type of sport"

**FUZZY ZOELLER**

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stable as changes settle down. I have worked with clubs and managers to support leadership and change and understand the need to plan ahead for what may be coming down the line.

### Is it inevitable that some managers won't be right for a club and vice versa?

It's like a football club – if a new owner or manager comes in, then it can lead to a change of direction or staff turnover as they have their own view. As the manager in post, you need to read the room and understand what is required and if it is the right fit for you. In that kind of circumstance, it is important to stay professional and not be drawn into taking sides with members or staff. Listening to each stakeholder is important as you support the club through a period of change.

When a manager is new to the role, then it is key to know exactly what the remit is and that it is shared with all. Full support from the board/owner is essential when you have to make key changes. From a recruitment perspective, I have been on both sides of the fence and now as a recruiter I can really see when someone may be the right fit for a particular club, or if it may not be the role for them at a given point in their career. Having worked closely with so many clubs and managers, I have seen the benefit of a clear strategy so that a club can recruit and retain the right candidate.

### What else led you down the consultancy route?

I was always ambitious and although as a professional I had longevity in my clubs (working at four in 20 years), each club helped me to develop my skills and experience in different ways of working. Moving into the management arena just felt natural and each role added another string to my bow. I had been lucky to work in a diverse range of clubs and really enjoyed the variety, so when I become a consultant, it was an opportunity to bring all this learning together to benefit a wider range of clubs.

### Are you consulting with the existing manager in situ or as an interim?

It has been a real mixture. I have covered a maternity and paternity leave, worked with managers on handovers, picked up when there has been no manager in place and had the opportunity to work hand in hand with great managers on various projects.

### What are some of the other skills you bring to the table?

I have a very good working knowledge on management operating systems, having project-managed four different systems prior to working on the Intelligent Golf (IG) software. Due to my knowledge from an operations side and as an independent consultant I have been able to put these skills to good use and have project-managed the IG system into eight different clubs including Kingswood, The Berkshire, The Hertsmere and, most recently, Basingstoke, while also offering website development support at Kingswood, West Hill and currently Basingstoke.

Once you are in the club, you get a real understanding of its needs and requirements, and I have supported a number of clubs through the recruitment process. This has led to me offering a full bespoke recruitment service, which is based on values and the criteria the club is looking for, with my most recent appointment the GM at Basingstoke GC. I've also had the opportunity to be involved in a number of course projects.



*The GCS Newsletter is still published in print form, not just as a pdf or online*

### You've also been involved in two major club relocation projects, haven't you?

Yes, first as part of Reading Golf Club's move to the newly launched The Caversham. I was acting general manager at Caversham Heath for 12 months, offering support to the GM of Reading GC. My role was to support him and the club on the move from Reading to Caversham. This involved planning five months in advance of the merger, managing the site and the team and transferring contracts over to Caversham until the GM was in place.

On the back of that role, I was approached to support the Basingstoke project. They had recently sold their Kempshott Park site and purchased Dummer GC and moved in July 2021. This was the biggest golf project in the south and I was asked in December 2021 to: offer general management support; install IG; launch a new website and recruit a GM, while utilising all my knowledge and contacts to support the club. This has evolved into preparing a future strategy, supporting the liquidation of the club and building a new governance structure. It has been quite a project, not without its challenges, and we are looking forward to the launch of the fantastic, redesigned course and new clubhouse later this summer with the new range due in 2025.

### Do you feel there's perhaps greater scope to say what you really feel or lead more confidently when consulting?

Yes, definitely. You are able to be more open and honest while as an employee you may have to be a little more considered, which is understandable. Clubs are approaching you for your advice and independent view, so you need to be direct with them. It is important that your feedback is evidence-based and has balance. In the end it is the club that will make the decision based on the feedback and facts you give them.

Based on years of experience and having worked with nearly 20 clubs in six and a half years, I can bring a unique insight that others may not have. With the commonality in clubs this has really enabled me to use a number of crossover projects, contacts or insights to help other clubs at the same time.

### What are the main differences between being a golf club pro and a general manager?

I have found it a very different role. As a pro, although friendly, you are naturally an individual and competitive, and you are

not really aware of what a GM does on day-to-day basis even though you think you are!

The thing I really noticed when I became a manager and part of the GCMA initially, then CMAE and The Golf Club Secretary, was that everyone puts their arms around each other. As I said at the start, you're always in demand but it's a lonely role, but when you're with your peer group, it makes you realise everyone's in the same boat but wants to learn and support each other. It really is enriching and a wonderful network to be a part of.

### What is the real key to running a successful golf club?

The most successful clubs I've worked at, and with, have a good governance structure in place, with clear lines of responsibility and communication and sound basics. You'll also find that the key heads of departments - the head pro, course, F&B and general managers - are all on the same page. While the board set the strategy and vision, the team delivers those goals and success. Communication is key to all of this, and I value working with boards and staff to achieve harmony through a period of change or development.

### In your view, has the Covid bubble burst yet?

No, but I think it's settled. The hard part with the Covid bubble

was that all clubs have a capacity. They could have taken 2,000 members but many clubs are built on an old infrastructure, so they don't have the facilities to cope with those numbers.

What's really changed is that membership has become value for money again. Clubs have reassessed their offering which has led to a reintroduction of joining fees and an increase in green fee and golf day prices but, the truth is, it's a correction, as running a top-quality course costs a considerable amount before you consider all other areas of the business.

### How important is The Golf Club Secretary newsletter to you?

I enjoy and read The GCS Newsletter because it's still a physical product. I appreciate that a printed copy vs online publication is a balance of cost and sustainability, but if it is printed, it becomes unique and if the content is of interest, you'll read it. You're looking for industry information and if it becomes just another email, well, it gets lost and missed in the hundreds of emails we receive. But if the newsletter is sitting in front of you and you've got a few minutes, then you can take the opportunity to read a hot topic and keep up with the latest industry news.

I also have to mention the fantastic events that GCS newsletter publisher, Michael Coffey, hosts around the country at some of the most stunning venues - long may that last! [GCS](#)

## Rainwater harvesting - how golf clubs can plan ahead for a sustainable future

Golf course architect, **Jonathan Gaunt**, highlights the need for golf clubs to be looking to do more to harvest and re-use rainwater given recent weather patterns and a growing need for the sport to become as sustainable as possible.



Golf course architect  
Jonathan Gaunt

The incessant rain of the past six months in the UK has been a problem in itself to golf courses, but so too is the amount of water that falls as rain and eventually flows out to sea. It's depressing to see a waterlogged course and no amount of optimism can make a 'course closed' sign any more palatable.

The reality is that golf courses in the UK have had it good, in terms of playability, for so long - at least since I started golfing in the 1970s. The playing season has extended and now continues throughout most of the winter. But since starting work in the industry in the 1980s, I can't remember a wetter autumn/winter - the wettest since the 1860s according to records, apparently.

But there are positives to be found in this weather pattern. The fact that there is so much water we could potentially collect (for free), rather than letting it flow out to sea, should be seen as a bonanza for golf courses, especially those relying on mains water for their irrigation supply.

How many courses are taking advantage of this, though? Very few. But there is now a groundswell of interest in rainwater harvesting, collection, storage and management led by imaginative course managers, primarily, with support from England Golf, The R&A, course architects, engineers, ecologists, hydrologists and suppliers of irrigation and drainage infrastructure.

I can't say I've designed a rainwater harvesting system into every course I've designed; however, our course design work has, on numerous occasions, involved the creation of intensive drainage systems through piped drainage, swales, open ditches, burns, streams, hollows, run-offs, ponds, lagoons, wetlands and marsh. We didn't call it 'rainwater harvesting' - it was, basically, drainage. But when you connect everything together and the water collected is stored in ponds for re-use through the irrigation system, it is, essentially, the sustainable harvesting of rainwater.

A golf course is simply a drainage system with an imaginative playing field superimposed upon it. A well-drained course will likely remain open for longer through extreme weather events and should therefore be an efficient, professionally run, successful business. A course that remains in play throughout the year will attract more members and visitors and can be maintained to a higher standard.

We are currently involved in some interesting golf redevelopment projects where their source of irrigation water is an Environment Agency (EA) licensed abstraction from a borehole or a watercourse/spring with mains water back-up.

In all cases, there are potential vulnerabilities with the way these clubs are able to source water for irrigation. Two of the



Detailed plans for a water management project at a Warwickshire Golf Club

courses are in the Midlands, the other in north-west England. One Midlands course is on the edge of an area of “water stress”, where the EA has stated that, in 2025, their abstraction permit (from a watercourse) will be reduced by over 30%. The difference will need to be made up by other means. The course in the north west regularly experiences high rainfall (over 1,500mm per year), but despite this, in the summer its water source (spring-fed) has to be shared with local residential properties.

Irrigation water requirements for each course will vary depending on the impact of ever-changing summer weather patterns. In simple terms, an 18-hole course with an automatic system to greens, tees and approaches would use 8,500-15,000m<sup>3</sup> of water in a ‘normal’ summer, allowing for up to 100 days without rainfall – seemingly unlikely in the UK, given the volume of rainfall over the past 200 days.

Financially, that’s a lot of water to pay for if the club is reliant on mains water. A previous client uses only mains water because its application to the EA for a licensed borehole was refused due to the aquifer beneath being protected (for agricultural use). The likely cost of mains water from a private water supply company is expected to rise significantly over the next 15 years. In 2019, together with an irrigation engineer, we calculated that the club in question could see a return on a £750k investment (in a 40,000m<sup>3</sup> water storage pond) within 15 years, based on rising mains water costs. So, whether your course irrigation water source is mains, borehole or spring/river-supplied, you need to make sure your investment is protected.

Drought will cause immeasurable damage to playing surfaces, as in 2018, and some golf courses have still not fully recovered. With an on-site rainwater-harvested water storage pond, a course has control over the management and health of its playing surfaces.

Owen James, sustainability manager at England Golf, recently stated in his article, ‘Gambling with water’ in *Pitchcare* (March/April 2024), “There is no legal obligation for water boards to supply water for anything other than residential use.” The EA, Internal Drainage Boards and private water companies, have limited concern for the requirement to give golf clubs permission to use or to supply water for course irrigation systems. Dave Throup, trustee and director of Heart of England Forest (formerly area environment manager at the EA) told me recently that the EA has power to revoke abstraction licences without compensation in areas where there is likely to be insufficient water to allow abstraction without damaging the environment.

So, golf clubs must find their own sustainable water-sourcing solution. Rainwater harvesting is the answer and it is sensible, logical and, in most cases, affordable.

If all courses in the UK&I (about 3,000) collected all the rain that falls on their (combined) land (about 1,256km<sup>2</sup>) in just a 1cm rain event, the water would fill 50 Olympic swimming pools... which is a lot. Then add up how many 1cm rainfall events there have been in the past six months!

We’re currently working together with Paul Woodham, head of sustainable agronomy – Europe at The R&A, and Gwynn Davies and Dr Tom Young at The Environment Partnership (TEP) to find ways of identifying how best to collect rainwater on a golf course site without impacting on playability and maintainability. With imaginative design, we can work new water collection and management features into the design, adding to the aesthetics and playing strategy of some holes, improving drainage efficiency and increasing biodiversity. Of course, site size makes a big difference. Trying to find space for a pond, for example, which needs to store up to 15,000m<sup>3</sup> of rainwater, is a big footprint – often up to 10,000m<sup>2</sup> – so water storage can split into several smaller ponds and lagoons.

If this volume of water can be accommodated on site, the club will be able to withstand even a summer drought, without the risk of the ‘taps being switched off’.

At two of the clubs mentioned, we’re finalising design proposals for the creation of new practice facilities, together with refinements to the course layout and, most importantly, new water bodies to store collected rainwater. These particular projects are fully funded using imported inert soils following planning authority and EA permits.

Young refers to the masterplan at Kenilworth GC as being ‘water-centric’ and has been leading the research here, together with Davies. The course, on clay soils, has suffered with poor drainage for years but course manager, Steve Hardy, decided it was time to find a permanent and sustainable answer, working with TEP to devise an imaginative solution, which impacts positively on the drainage capabilities of a golf course and provides, together with flood attenuation, for on-site water storage of up to 40,000m<sup>3</sup>. Our full-course masterplan has involved the design of course improvements, additional/new practice facilities and accommodating the requirements of the rainwater harvesting system.

It’s not just about how much water can be stored on site. Woodham refers to the important role site design and microclimate play in promoting the most durable grass species, as well as greenkeeping management ensuring that the available water is utilised well and efficiently. Woodham says, “R&A Sustainable Agronomy is working hard to communicate the need to work responsibly and not just try to draw more water. I see design and management as critical to this, but we also strongly support solutions that can demonstrate sustainable water security and move away from the use of mains water or daily abstraction from already stressed rivers and aquifers.”

For more information, email **Jonathan Gaunt** of Gaunt Golf Design Limited at [jonathan@gaunt-golf-design.com](mailto:jonathan@gaunt-golf-design.com). Find out more about water security and solutions via the dedicated section at The R&A’s Golf Course 2030 website: <https://golfcourse2030water.com/solutions> **GCS**

## Some thoughts on sustainable bunkering



*Alistair Beggs, Head of Sustainable Agronomy Services at The R&A, looks at the various-priced options available to improve the quality and conditioning of bunkers and suggests that fewer, better-placed ones may be the way ahead for many clubs as sustainability increases in importance.*



*Attractively presented and well-performing bunkers on the par-3 5th at West Sussex GC*

**B**unkers and their upkeep and management continue to grab an unequal share of comment from golfers - and budget from golf club treasurers - because in this age, visual impact and perfection of presentation are important to all golfers. These features, which we must remember developed from animal scrapes and were transferred away from the common links land by man, need to be fair in the minds of most golfers and must exert a quantifiable and measurable punishment for failed execution. Surprises generated by unmanaged vegetation, accumulations of sand or excess moisture are increasingly unacceptable to the majority.

This ordered perfection, and the costs that come with delivering on these expectations, is a predictable consequence of the dominance nowadays of medal golf over match play forms of the game and means that the unpredictability of the old-world bunkers, where a fate worse than death often befell the errant golfer, can no longer be applied. But this is now the age of sustainability. Clubs must be prudent, consider the future and try to improve the resilience of their courses. Bunkers, at least on sites where sand is not the native base material, are a potential weakness and their future form and structure needs to be thought about more carefully than ever before.

In order to deliver on the demands of the modern golfer, clubs are being forced to consider some new high-tech options. Their use may cost considerable sums of money, but some clubs are prepared to pay this in an attempt to put the bunker debate to bed once and for all. Is this the right approach? It might be for some wealthier clubs with high aspirations, but not all clubs have bottomless pits of money to spend on bunkers. This article summarises some of the current options available to help make bunkers a little more sustainable.

### **A short summary of the challenges regularly observed**

Many problems can arise with bunker faces and floors over time, and with use. Floors become uneven, sand depths inconsistent, sand becomes contaminated and the body of the bunker begins to hold water. Floors lose their shape and begin to slope towards the face, and stone contamination from depth interferes with clean striking and recovery.

On faces, sand washout can be a problem leading to major clean-up operations after heavy rains. Turf faces rot and decline and are undercut by erosive effects. Revetted walls, particularly those exposed to southern sun, degenerate and decline and need replacement on an ever more regular cycle. Bunker heads build up sand very quickly, particularly those which are visited regularly. It can become increasingly difficult to maintain sand and retain turf quality when the build-up becomes significant. Whatever the style, the bunker, like the rest of the course, is organic and is in a constant state of flux. The problem is that maintaining standards here is expensive and very draining on budgets.

Sand types vary enormously from angular and coarse to rounded and fine and there is no perfect choice. However, finer sands need a safer and more secure home to prevent wind blow and are often found at the bottom of a deep pit on a links. Heavier and coarser sands work better on shallower inland models but have to be sourced and imported at increasing cost. Furthermore, these sands are costing more and quality cannot always be guaranteed. These challenges will become more manifest as time passes.

The moisture content of a sand will influence how a bunker plays. On many an occasion I have had golfers say to me that the sand in the bunkers is inconsistent or there is not enough of it! It may be, but it is not because there are four or five different types of sand in their bunkers. It is usually because the moisture levels vary due to water table issues or poor drainage, contamination or the inability to irrigate the sand. As one can see, it is difficult to deliver consistency to 80 or 90 small holes full of sand on a limited budget!

### **So, what are the options available for making bunkers a little more robust? Here are some to consider from the most frugal to the more grandiose.**

The fundamental problem with many bunkers is that the floors are poorly shaped and often poorly drained. Placing and shaping malleable soil or turf layers over a well-shaped base of a bunker is probably the most traditional and cheapest way of providing a good solid base and preventing contamination



*The past year's weather has exposed the vulnerabilities of the bunkers at many courses*

from underlying stone or flint. The success of the operation depends on the quality/source of the soil and turf and the effectiveness of the drainage system, which must be integrated with it.

Woven textile liners and artificial turf are the next step up. These materials can work well and help shape and protect bases, provided they are installed and maintained to a high standard. In essence, they are not desperately expensive and provide a cost-effective option for some clubs.

Revetted faces are generally favoured on links sites to stabilise often steep slopes of sandy material. Traditionally, natural turf has been used for this work but there is a move in some quarters to build walls with artificial turf. The main advantage of this is that the wall becomes a permanent feature and does not need to be replaced ad infinitum. However, while this may provide a solution for some clubs, a great many still do not like the idea of plastic bunkers, particularly on sites that are heralded for their natural excellence.

The most expensive and probably the most successful lining materials are those developed around porous concrete or porous rubber-based products and their derivatives. These products are generally introduced by professional installers or contractors and aim to provide a total solution to drainage, shaping, plugging and visual appearance issues. However, it should be appreciated that these solutions are generally expensive, particularly when the technique needs to be repeated 70 or 80 times over!

In current circumstances, perhaps the best solution of all would be to review the status, style and number of bunkers on your site using a recognised golf architect who is totally independent. With the cost of many of the above solutions being significant and the quality, cost and provenance of sand far from clear in the future, many clubs could probably get by with fewer, better-placed bunkers and better utilisation of natural features and contours. This could result in a more natural and enjoyable challenge, fewer bunkers for members to become concerned about and, where money is spent, it can be focused on key strategic bunkers rather than superfluous ones. The end result is a more sustainable course and one less reliant on sand in the future.

In summary, bunkers continue to attract an unequal share of golf course budgets and an unequal share of course criticism and, in the wrong form, have the potential to make courses and businesses less sustainable. There are a range of products available to clubs and these deliver solutions at different levels. The only way to ensure success is to spend big, but if you do, do so with an eye to the future – a future where sand may be difficult to source in the quantity and quality required. And make sure the bunkers are in the right place to service the modern golfer. You won't want to be moving them anytime soon with expensive liners just placed. [GCS](#)

## New flexible working legislation



*Alistair Smith, CEO of the NGCAA, summarises where the law now stands on flexible working requests, how such requests must be made, how employers must respond and what the acceptable grounds for refusal are.*

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 (the Act) received Royal Assent on July 20th, 2023 and has brought in some changes to the existing statutory flexible working request regime, effective from April 6th, 2024.

The right to request flexible working has been around for a long time now, with various amendments during its existence. The coronavirus pandemic changed the landscape of working during government lockdowns and restrictions, with many employers and employees initially "forced" into working-from-home arrangements. There appears to have been a cultural shift in attitudes towards flexible working since then, hence the legislative changes. While the initial drafts of the legislation had more wide-ranging rights for employees, the eventual position appears to strike a happy medium, particularly with the requirement to consult before a decision is made.

The statutory reasons for refusing a request stay the same, although it may be more difficult for employers to successfully rely upon them if the requested arrangements worked without a hitch in 2020/21 during the Covid restrictions.

### Changes

The Act makes the following changes to the pre-existing flexible working regime, namely:

- The introduction of a requirement for employers to consult with the employee before making a decision on the flexible working request if the employer is minded to refuse the request or to make modifications to the original request.
- An employee can now make two statutory requests within any 12-month period (rather than the current one request per 12 months).

- A reduction in the decision period within which an employer is required to administer the statutory request from three months to two months.
- The removal of the requirement that the employee must explain in their statutory request what effect the change would have on the employer and how that might be dealt with.

In light of these changes, it would appear sensible to summarise the overall position in relation to flexible working requests. It is important to note, though, that the right remains a 'right to request' as opposed to a right to actually work on a flexible basis. There then follows a procedure where the request can only be refused for certain reasons, as set out below.

### Who can make a request?

All employees have the right to request flexible working, whatever their circumstances and whatever the purpose is for making the request. The employee no longer needs to have 26 weeks of continuous service with their employer and so the right to request flexible working will be available from the first day of service. The final requirement is that they must not have made two previous requests within the last 12 months.

The statutory scheme does not apply to agency workers either, unless they are returning to work from a period of parental leave.

While the statutory regime only applies to employees, some clubs may decide to consider requests from those people in the 'worker' category as well. While they don't fit the criteria for the statutory regime for employees, a point-blank refusal might give rise to claims of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

### Flexible working patterns available under the statutory scheme

Statutory requests can be made to:

- Change the hours the employee is required to work.
- Change the times when the employee is required to work.
- Change where the employee is required to work, as between the home and the place of business of their employer.

There is no restriction on what the changes might involve; clubs may wish to consult the ACAS Code of Practice on requests for flexible working (published in January 2024) if responding to a flexible working request for further information on this point, and more generally on flexible working requests. Examples might include that the employee wants to reduce their hours in order to work part-time, change start and finish times, work the same hours over fewer days (compressed hours), work from home or perhaps share the job with someone else. They may make their request in respect of all working days or just some of them and it could be for a limited period of time or permanent. Note, though, that if the request is made to work at a place other than their home or the employer's place of work, it would fall outside of the statutory scheme.

### Making a statutory request

The requirements regarding the form and content of the flexible working request are that it should:

- say that it is a request for flexible working;
- specify the change the employee would like to make;
- give the date when the employee would like the change to happen;
- be made in writing;
- state whether a previous request has been made by the employee to the employer and, if so, when; and
- be dated.

It is important for the request to be dated because that marks the beginning of the 'decision period' within which the employee must notify the employer of its decision in relation to the request.

### The employer's response

Once a valid request has been submitted, the employer must deal with the request in a reasonable manner and it must notify the employee of its decision on the request within the two-month decision period.

Dealing with the request in a reasonable manner is clearly a very broadly worded provision with no specific detail included in statutory provisions. The latest change to the legislation introduced by the Act does require consultation between the parties, so some form of consultation meeting before making a decision would certainly appear to form part of that reasonableness test.

### Grounds for refusing a statutory request

The employer may only refuse a request for flexible working if it considers that one or more of the following grounds for refusal apply:

- The burden of additional costs
- Detrimental effect on the ability to meet customer demand
- Inability to reorganise work among existing staff
- Inability to recruit additional staff
- Detrimental impact on quality
- Detrimental impact on performance
- Insufficiency of work during the periods of time that the employee proposes to work
- Planned structural changes e.g., the employer intends to reorganise or change the business and thinks the request will not fit with these plans

If the employer decides to reject the request, it would be well advised to send notification of the decision to the employee and to state which grounds apply and explain why it considers that ground, or those grounds, applicable.

There is no requirement to offer an appeal against a refused request to the employee, but some may do so in an effort to foster good employment relations and to head off potential disputes.

It is also worth noting that there can still be the potential for discrimination claims under the Equality Act 2010 lurking behind flexible working requests, so clubs would be sensible to take advice if they are at all unsure about the process of responding to a flexible working request.

*For further advice on flexible working or any other legal matters affecting your golf club, please contact **Alistair Smith**, CEO of the NGCAA on **0188 6812943** or **office@ngcaa.co.uk** *

## Time for deep aeration of compacted soils

*Paul Woodham, Head of Sustainable Agronomy - Europe at The R&A, stresses that deep aeration work is needed in the coming months after the exceptional levels of rainfall that golf courses have endured for months, both to help course conditioning now and to prepare for the unwelcome possibility of yet more prolonged rainfall in the autumn.*

In last September's *Postage Stamp*, I discussed the topic of aeration and posed a question: "Are we aerating as well as we should be?" This came after what was then six weeks of persistent rain commencing last July and, from observations that I have been starting to see evidence of, soil compaction and compaction-related concerns are now a reality, especially in soil-based greens. Surface ponding, poor drainage and shallow rooting had been commonly seen in many situations while the wet conditions dominated the second half of the summer. Now, months on, I think it's worth revisiting this scenario and following up on my notes in last month's article where I commented that supplementary aeration is advised as a countermeasure to deal with the consequences of these conditions.

Many courses have been subjected to flooding and saturated soil conditions over the winter and, even during March and April, it was commonplace to see courses implementing contingency measures with shortened holes, partial closure or extended periods of full closure. Even a few millimetres of rain was enough to add to the weight of water in the soil and prevent much-needed drying. During this period, clubs have been very understanding and supportive of greenkeeping teams, who are trying their best but cannot beat the weather.

There are consequences of sustained wetness, long periods of saturated soils and localised flooding. The soil structure is squeezed by the weight of water as just 10cm of standing water over 1m<sup>2</sup> is loading 100kg of weight. Then there is the impact of traffic causing damage to the soil porosity and the physical pressure of water in the soil, which can mobilise the soil particles leading to the development of increased bulk density as fine soil particles - silt and clay - wash into the air spaces.

Aside from the physical force of water, we also need to consider how the plant morphology can be affected. A warm wet winter has the potential to stimulate weak and shallow rooting, especially in compacted soils. The plant has had little need to develop roots at depth because of the abundance of water in the upper profile. The danger now, with this having happened, is that the topsoil could dry out quickly if there is



*Still an all-too-common sight on many inland golf courses even into May*

a swift transition into summer. The compacted soils will then become very tight and offer little penetration of water to depth. The onset of drought could be problematic but I am thinking further ahead to next autumn when even moderate wet weather could pose more of a threat than normal if we haven't alleviated the problems left from the conditions we have been battling over the past months.

In terms of rainfall, levels are at their highest for any 18-month period in England since comparable data began in 1836, according to analysis by the PA news agency of Met Office provisional statistics. This is staggering when we take into account two periods of drought during this period.

So, the message is a call to action rather than submission to the conditions. I would suggest there is every reason to be proactive with deep solid-tine aeration work aimed at improving the soil structure. This work could be widespread in the areas impacted by wet conditions, even in areas that have been protected from traffic. [GCS](#)

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*COMING SOON*

Thoughts on some of the main changes to WHS for 2024