



NORMY NEWS

February 2021

- *Appreciation*
 - *Finances*
 - *5 Year Course Plan / 13th Pond*
 - *Simulator feasibility / Ron Munton*
-

Appreciation

Wow what a year this last 12 months has been! I don't think many of us will have had a more trying year in both our personal and professional lives. As a board of volunteers, balancing what has happened in our personal lives with the obvious pressure of keeping the golf club in a financially viable position has been a tough one. We are really proud of our membership and the fact that the majority have stuck by us and understand the challenging times we have had as a golf club. We think it is fair to say most people have had enough with being locked up at home and we appreciate the tremendous stress the virus has had on our membership whether this being health worries, loss of loved ones, loss of income or even home schooling.

Hopefully with the roll out of the vaccine the end is in sight and I think it is the opinion of most that golf will return soon however we may have to wait a little longer for the bar and hospitality to return to normal.

Finances

Despite the rain-affected winter of 2019-20, we managed almost to break even on the year's operations – this after depreciation charges of £34,000 on our course machinery. Though an improvement on 2018-19, it did nothing for our bank balance which was worryingly low at year-end as a result of many members delaying their subscription payments at the onset of the first Covid lockdown.

For several years now our membership fees have been among the lowest in the area – insufficient to cover the cost of providing golf, which has been subsidised by the profit from our hospitality facilities (weddings, conferences, etc). The near break-even achieved in 2019-20 was made possible only by hospitality profit of approximately £75,000. Members will appreciate, then, that we are heavily dependent on our hospitality business.

The current financial year, now nearing its end, has seen hospitality income of practically zero thanks to Covid-19. Fortunately, we have succeeded in accessing all the government support available and, by very close attention to cost control, have managed to keep the Club's head above water.

The past twelve months have been demanding and worrying, with an early return to normality still a hope rather than an expectation. We are fairly confident that the year will end on a positive note financially, but we are also very aware that we cannot continue to pin our survival only on the health of our hospitality facilities. About £30,000 which might have been used for further course investment has been taken up by the subscription refund. Costs will be higher in 2021-22 not only because of inevitable inflation – just one per cent on purchases and wage costs would increase our expenditure by more than £5,000 – but also because of investment in the replacement of ageing course machines. We need to re-structure our systems over the next few years so that golf can fund itself, gradually releasing more funding for course maintenance and development.

All who renew their membership for 2021-22 can look forward to receiving a refund of a minimum of one month's worth of their current year's subscription as it has become obvious to the Directors from member feedback that a financial refund would be much more appreciated by members than the delaying of the golf year by one month as originally quoted. Members will see this refund itemised in their subscription invoice which they will receive next week.

5 Year Plan and the Course

The acting Green Director together with a newly formed Greens Committee are continuously examining ways to explore how the course can improve and working tremendously hard towards that goal. Please take time to read the regular updates from Andy and his Committee to understand the work they are doing and their improvement strategy. There is a commitment to continually improving the maintained condition of the Golf Course for it to return to the best course in the region. However this doesn't happen automatically and is dependent on identifying additional investment which will hopefully come from the new Business Model.

- With having such a successful hospitality business, we envisage having a considerable gap between our membership fees and other "top" courses in the area. At present rather than hospitality creating investment it is keeping us afloat and standing still. At no point are we attempting to match other courses apart from some of the investment they produce without such a lucrative business.
- Whilst a proportion of this change will be funded through membership price increases, we will also be looking at other ways to fund the gap. This will involve focus on some cost areas and looking at where we can maximise other revenue streams.

The need for a long term plan for the course is even more evident to us all due to the re-occurring adverse climate and also our financial fortunes critically affected by the Pandemic. Recent years have seen an unseasonal amount of rainfall, with a record 30mm falling in just one day just prior to the lockdown. This recent deluge is becoming a regular occurrence at this time of year so we need to make changes to try to redress its effects on the course. Effects of climate on the course has been a long term issue, made worse in the last decade or so by the changing nature and its intensity, we need to recognise this long term affect is probably here to stay and not just a medium term blip in the weather.

As part of our long term planning we intend to change our resources provisions, this includes how we employ our green staff and the nature in which they work over the seasons. This seasonal work routine mentioned in the Greens Directors recent report along with other initiatives are all part of a strategy we feel brings immediate benefit to the club and the course. Furlough has been a lifeline that we had to take firm hold of due to our model being heavily dependent on hospitality income.

The recent lockdown has caused us to take even deeper measures to ensure we get some productive work in the winter months but use Government aid where possible, a balanced measure we feel has benefited the club massively. Events last year, post lockdown, were driven mainly by our lack of resources, some recognised this but a few believed we could achieve more, even asking for normal was a challenge, the staff did a fantastic job under the circumstances we aim to do better going forward.

Any plan will only stand the test if all aspects of it are followed through. The key elements have been touched on in this section, Weather resilience, resources, and finally the one we all are keen to see, continued improvements. All depend on investment, all depend on resource management and most of all depend on your support. We have received correspondence both good and bad, critical and complimentary, all is taken positively, we all have a say but it's up to those appointed to try to make any plan work, only given the three elements mentioned do we feel we will have succeeded, any one element absent and our task is so much harder.

We will also be asking members to be more actively involved in fundraising activities to help bridge the gap, the success of this will result in more money invested in the course and how much we must increase membership fees to sustain a viable business model. Funds raised this way will be used in a targeted way, helping to pay directly for the project they are meant for, a good example might be for the restoration of certain areas of the course not covered by conventional subscription funding such as the collapsed pond on the 13th.

Fundraising for the 13th pond

- Our first project we would like the membership/sections/committees to consider for funding is the 13th pond. You may have noticed the walls have collapsed and will need investment to bring this back to how we would like.
- The need to repair the 13th pond has become an urgent health and safety issue, especially as it is adjacent to a public footpath. This is a significant unexpected cost which has therefore become a pressing issue and one which we would not want to divert other funds for course improvement to fixing if it can be helped.
- Whilst accurate costing are yet to be finalised we are expecting it to be circa £10-15K as the pond is considerable in size (approx 30mtrs by 10mtrs) this is based on utilising our own labour plus the use of an excavator throughout, however we will be obtaining a professional estimate.
- Anyone who would like to help and has ideas of how they may generate some extra funds then please let the office know and one of the directors will be in touch. We are not expecting any single idea funding the whole pot and every little bit of money will help to divert money away from this into other areas. Regular updates on funding will be distributed to members on our progress.

Simulator Feasibility

The Directors met very recently to consider early proposals to look at the possibility of establishing a brand new state of the art indoor practice (and teaching) facility – Simulator. Many clubs in the region have invested in similar facilities, proving extremely successful with their membership and profitable, to the extent that several have duplicated their facility since investing in their original one.

Besides being hopefully very beneficial to our members, we believe it could also be of considerable assistance to Gary, our Pro in enhancing the quality of the coaching side of his business. Whilst the feasibility study is continuing the Board would be extremely interested to discover what member interest there is out there before we consider investing in such a facility.

In order to gauge this interest we intend to create a short on-line survey which we will ask you to complete and “submit” in about 1 weeks time, so keep a look out for the email notice coming to you some time in the near future.

Ron Munton

We are sad to report the passing of Ronald Munton, who passed away on 06.02.21. Ron was NGC's longest serving member for over 71 years where he had held numerous official positions many years ago but mainly as Treasurer at the old course. Details of Ronald funeral will be posted as soon as we are given appropriate information

*Anyone with any news items for future letters, please contact Richard thro the office at office@normantongolf.co.uk