

**Knighton Heath Golf Club**

**Annual Greens Report**

2023

As we head towards the end of the 2023 golfing season it gives us a chance to reflect on what has been another successful season here at Knighton Heath. Course was run slightly under budget for the year mainly as we aim to reduce the fertiliser and chemical inputs over the entire site to encourage the native Flora to return to the course. We also tackled some small budget but large impact work through the winter. Jobs including

* In house tree and scrub removal
* Tree canopy raising
* Hired equipment to clear the undergrowth of these areas
* Removal of fairway bunker on 17th
* Leaf collection and clearance
* New mowing lines around green surrounds

Our fantastic irrigation system aided us through the dry spells of the year, which have been few a far between. This summer it has been used sparingly to ensure we keep uniform coverage where we can as some areas dry much faster than others due to the differing soils across our site. We have seen the instant benefits the system has had on the course and we will see continued improvement across all irrigated areas in years to come as we establish grass around all green complexes. Many compliments on the Approaches this year which is great to hear, we have reduced the height on these down to 9mm this season, (they were maintained at 10mm last season) they have coped with this extremely well and hope to reduce the height next season also. This process is only made possible by having the reliable irrigation system. It is not the only reason for the condition of the approaches but we couldn’t maintain them to their current standard without it.

Our two maintenance weeks have gone extremely well. We performed a very similar working week in March as we did in the August. All details of the work were sent out to the membership in the week before, these plans were completed as described. Only exception being that we added a verticut to the approaches in the August week. This was something we needed to do in order to continue pushing the approaches on, in search of improvement. Very glad we did as this takes out a lot of the lateral growth, stands up the grass plant allowing a tighter and more uniform cut.

We hope the benefits of a slightly earlier Summer maintenance week can be seen now, before I arrived, I understand the Summer (or Autumn as it effectively was) maintenance was performed towards the end of September or even into October. While this is outside of the main golfing season it is also outside of the main growing season meaning recovery is slow and signs of this maintenance can linger on through the entire Winter period. This year we saw 100% recovery within 10days and a return to summer conditions and standards within 2 weeks.

We still have some mini greens maintenance work to do including

* Seeding of Bent grass
* Micro tining (8mm diameter) to ensure air is available in the soil and create space for rooting
* Very light top dressing to promote smooth ball roll after seeding
* Verticutting to help stand grass upright and remove lateral growth

All of these tasks will be forewarned and disruption to golf will be kept to an absolute minimum.

As well as these works to the greens we intend to begin the large task of cutting some of our Heather out on the course. In some areas this Heather is effectively dying. Heather has a life cycle comprising of the Pioneer stage

(basically establishment), Building stage (where the plant becomes established), Mature stage (well established), Degenerate (becoming too long and unable to sustain itself). This last Degenerate stage is where I believe a lot of our large stands of Heather are and if left will simply be out grown by competing plants and over time be completely lost. This work will begin once we have seen some ground frost as this is when the seeds are formed in the tips of the Heather.

Along with the Heather work we are looking at some more tree management out on the course, specifically taking non native trees, old, weak trees, trees which are impacting on play and trees which are preventing Heathland restoration. These areas are still under review and will be explained to the membership once any plans are in place.

We are excited to have another 3 greens drained this winter. DJuke (company who installed the drainage system to greens 8 and 17) are returning in October to install drainage to our Putting Green, 1st Green and 3rd Green. With the work happening in October (dates to be confirmed), we will gain the full benefit from this work right through the upcoming winter. After seeing this process at my previous golf club and knowing how much of a difference it has made here already, I’m very much looking forward to witnessing the instant impact on the next 3 greens. Huge thanks to all at the club for supporting this work.

We also look forward to Huxley installing new practice nets at the end of the putting green. These will be more visible and far more enjoyable to use, all improving the members experience here. These are due to be installed week commencing October 30th.

We have hosted some impressive events (the weather tried its very best to ruin a couple) which seemed to be well received by members and visitors alike. To name a few we had

* Four Counties Boys tournament
* Andy Nicholas Memorial Scratch Open
* Dorset Ladies Autumn Meeting
* Dorset Interclub Mens Foresomes Championship

These are just the external events hosted, from all of which we gained some great feedback on the course and club as a whole. We look forward to continuing our relationship with the Dorset County Golf Union as we host events through the years.

One area I hold my hands up and say we must improve on last year is regarding winter mats and temporary greens. Through the winter I was quite surprised just how wet the tees became. This happened very quickly and they did not drain until we gained some warmth in the spring. Mats this year will have a variety of areas to place a tee, drilled through the mat and have a rubber tee holder inserted (more on this will be included in Septembers course report). Also, temporary greens will be maintained to a better standard this year, hopefully on the fronts of our approaches. These are in great condition and so should provide a better winter golfing experience this year.

Through all of these events and everyday since March 2022 I have been amazed and extremely proud to be playing a small part in the wonderful team, we have here at Knighton Heath Golf Club. I work with 6 dedicated, skilled, kind and talented greenkeepers everyday who make working here a real pleasure. Thank you to each one of them for all the work they have put in this year and from all of the wonderful comments we have heard about the course conditions let not ever forget it is all down to these guys.

Huge thank you to our greens committee also for supporting us as a team, passing on feedback and generally including us in the club, really does go a long way.

My personal thanks go out to Reunert for helping and assisting me through my first year as a Course Manager and we wish him well in his retirement.

Lastly a big welcome to our new General Manager Kevin. Kevin has been through a similar start to life at Knighton Heath as myself with a move and issues of school placements but now things are settled and we wish him and his family a true Knighton welcome to Dorset.

Thanks for reading as always, thanks for everyone’s support, thanks for the opportunity to manage such a wonderful golf course. We will continue to push the course forward and while we are looking forward to some winter works, we know 2024 will be another cracking golfing season.

Graham Hastie

Course Manager