



Greens Irrigation Policy.

(In line with Golf Course Management Programme.)

By

Alan Sharp.



Silecroft Golf Club - Irrigation Explanation.

The use of artificial irrigation is an often contentious issue.

The system available at Silecroft is a primitive “stand pipe” set up and requires a large manpower effort and can only be done in daylight hours when the bodies are available.

The downsides of doing it this way are numerous. Sadly when water is required it is normally warmer and drier and in the case of Silecroft Golf Club the constant breeze causes further complications.

Typically to maintain soil moisture you need to apply the equivalent of 25mm of water per week. On 9 greens this equates to 200,000 litres per week (approx. 45,000 gallons).

However, by applying this in the daylight most of this will evaporate and the water left in the top soil level gets so hot it basically poaches the roots as the sunlight is too strong.

To compensate for these issues you would need to apply around 500,000 litres a week. But with this amount of applied irrigation you fall into the trap of only satisfying the thirst of the weak grasses such as poa-annua which, on a links course, are extremely undesirable.

It is far too much water for the finer fescues and bents and they will be driven out as the water will struggle to get as far as these deeper rooting species.

The plan at Silecroft, has for some years now, been aimed at encouraging these deeper rooting grasses as they depend less on applied water and nutrient and our aim has been to fully utilise what nature gives us.

As an example, the greens at Dunnerholme have had no applied irrigation now for over three years and the bent grasses are flourishing with roots at least six inches deep.

When biological products are applied the uptake is instant and we now have very little seed head production which indicates the small presence of the undesirable grasses.

For clubs like ours with limited resources and manpower this has to be the way forward.

Now and again applying some water to control product application is fine but this should be done in overcast conditions or even with rain if it is a wetting agent being watered in.

But we should not be growing grass that needs copious amounts of water and nutrient as this costs money being spent with no real end result evident.

The benefits of fine grasses being prolific yield several advantages.

These encourage faster and truer running surfaces and the deep roots are able to tap in to a larger reservoir of ground water and nutrients.

With these present this also encourages the natural breakdown of thatch levels.

When it rains the grass reacts much more naturally which creates a sustainable management program being achieved.

But this does not happen overnight and previous regimes employed at the club can take years to sort out bearing in mind your budgetary limitations but it has to be done.

Criticisms are easy to make especially when there is a fundamental misunderstanding of soil biology and fine turf management present. What nature provides us with is for nothing so we must embrace this in our course policy and provide as much as possible soils that benefit from such an environment. You will not get this with over-watering or over-feeding – period!! Patience is required and a trust in your greens team and advisors is 100% required.

Footnote:

My deepest thanks go to Alan for this most informative piece.

The 7th Green is currently our problematic green; Alan has informed us that this particular green is suffering from lack of water retention.

To this end at every opportunity (Prolonged heavy rain) the 7th green will be treated with intensive wetting agent, this will help the sub soil retain any rain water at the deeper level required.

Keith Newton.

