

From the Captain
Mike Hayhurst



Friday 18 February is the Captain's Charity Quiz Night, which, I am happy to report, is sold out. On the notice boards now are lists of the auction items which have been donated. If you can't be at the auction, you can submit a sealed bid for any item which will only be opened on the night and used in the auction.

There is also a list of items for a Silent Auction for which you can also submit sealed bids, but where there will be no competition from bids from the floor. Sealed bids should have your name and the item marked on the envelope and left with the Office. A list of raffle prizes will also be available a week before the event and raffle tickets will be for sale then. I hope that we will raise a significant sum for my charity, the Jumbulance Trust.

GUR

We have a newly modified rule concerning Ground Under Repair (GUR). The previous local rule, under which it was obligatory to take a free drop from GUR, has been changed. You may now take a free drop or you may play the ball as it lies ... unless the GUR is marked with blue stakes in which case it is an Area Requiring Preservation and a (free) drop is mandatory. This new rule is on the back of the card and on the notice board.

Captain-Pro Challenge

There are many slots available for the Captain-Pro Challenge in the run-up to the AGM. It is open to any members to challenge us. If you can't play on Sunday, make a suggestion, Wednesday for example. The cost is a £10 donation to the Captain's charity and, in addition to a fun and educative round, the best challengers will win a prize.

Our 4 - starting point system

Our 4-starting point system is a real boon to being able to start whenever you want, but to make it work as well as possible new starters, and those already on their round, have to merge in an orderly manner. If there are balls on the green immediately before your starting tee, before you tee off, then you should allow that group to play through. On the 10th, if a group appears before you tee off, then they should be allowed to play on. Common sense, really.

Answering some of the issues you have raised

A number of issues have been raised recently by members, almost all of which have been discussed in committee in past months or years. We would like to take this opportunity to clarify information.

Q1 What is the policy on visitors at weekends?

A1 At weekends, unsponsored visitors are not be allowed to start before 11.30 am, unless application has been made to and sanctioned by the General Manager.

If we do not have income from societies and visitors, then we would need to generate income in other ways. This would probably mean raising our subscriptions significantly by several hundred pounds per member. We have significant overheads and wages to pay, and we have course and house standards that we all want to maintain and improve.

We will always accept and encourage members to bring and play golf with their guests, but, commercially, at this time, we also have to take in societies and unsponsored visitors. We have to be sensitive to our members' wishes as to when and how we do this to create the minimum of inconvenience. In 2010 there was a reduction in the number of non-member rounds played at Mid-Herts and it was also a tough time, commercially, for our club.

Members need to be aware of what we are aiming to achieve. In the case of non-member golf rounds, the Board is prepared to limit these to no more than 10% of members' annual rounds, on the proviso that membership fees exceed £550,000 per annum, which is the current level.

Q2 Why do we need to have the new arrangements for Sunday and Tuesday rather than the previous agreed separation?

A2 Since the beginning of October 2010 it has been illegal for clubs like ours to have rules, formal or informal, which discriminate on the basis of gender (among several other "protected characteristics"). The arrangements so far have worked acceptably well and will develop as we learn more about course usage at these times.

Q3 Why don't we use some of the timber we generate when trees are cut down or lopped to make marker blocks for the tees instead of the plastic ones we currently use?

A3 Wooden markers take a lot of work to create and generally do not last very long. The greens staff have other work to do which is of higher priority. If a group of members would like to volunteer make markers, they would be very welcome but do bear in mind that we need 108 of them.

Q4 Why do we use plastic discs to mark the fairway distances, they crack and have to be replaced? Why not use concrete discs which last and only need occasional replacement?

A4 Plastic discs are easily visible and do not damage mowers. Concrete discs gradually ride up and can then do serious damage to mowers and, at the very least, take significant effort to rebury them. Other forms of marker have their problems of degradation and upkeep as well.

**From the Chairman
John Ireland**

By the time most of you read this issue, work on resurfacing the car park and road from the professional's shop down to the 10th tee, will largely have been completed, and the final levelling of spoil either side of the new works will be underway. I hope you will agree that it's a job well done and will enhance our club for many years to come. We would like to thank Neil Biscoe for his support in drawing up the specification and helping with the tenders.



Hopefully, this is another improvement which will go towards building a new image for Mid-Herts. I say new image, because the competition to attract, keep and retain members of golf clubs has never been fiercer. Special deals abound, from no joining fees to three months free golf. Clubs are giving away their revenue streams to attract new members to fill vacancies and plug their deficits.

Your Board has taken an alternative view, which I believe will benefit all members and our club. We have to differentiate and become the local club of choice. We have to make our club the one that good golfers want to join and, alongside existing members, stay with, because they can enjoy their golf game more at Mid-Herts than at any other local club. By offering better enjoyment and quality at Mid-Herts, we will increase and improve our membership levels and then, maybe, we can retain joining fees and improve our revenues.

While we will always welcome visitors and societies, hopefully we can become less reliant on them. I am sure that Mid-Herts members would prefer not to have unsponsored visitors or societies, and I believe that is because we are very protective of what we have. At present we rely on the income that visitors provide and we welcome them. Happily there has been an improvement in courtesy towards our guests – long may it continue.

I was very concerned recently to hear that rumours were circulating outside the Club that Mid-Herts was changing to become a pay and play course because it was in financial difficulty. This is completely untrue and those disseminating these ridiculous stories do a great disservice to the Club. We are a thriving members club and have absolutely no plans to change this.

Please members, if you feel aggrieved, come and talk to a member of your Board, not a member of your pub. You are damaging the club that you pay a subscription to every year. What is the point? Your mate in the pub can't explain things or put them right, your Board member can.

CASC

Without doubt, membership of CASC would offer a very significant reduction in costs to our Club. Your Board is in no doubt about this. Over the last months I have talked at length to members, other clubs playing all types of sports, St Albans Council and representatives of HM Revenue and Customs. It is the latter where there remain unanswered questions, largely as a result of lack of case history. I have taken all the views into consideration, and following discussion with your Board members, we have concluded that we should let the matter of CASC rest until issues become clearer and until we feel it is the will of the majority to progress this matter further for the benefit of our Club.

So, how are we going about improving our Club and the enjoyment of our game?

The course

We hope you agree that the course is currently in superb condition. Granted there are soft aprons and some muddy paths but, compared to how it has been, there is a vast improvement. This is a result of regularly seeding the tees last summer to provide a thicker sward which will stand up more to wear and tear. The fairways were slit and seeded last autumn and you can just see the new grass coming through now and, with the current programme of spraying and verti-draining, will

give us better grassed fairways that will stand up to the rigours of our ever-changing weather.

The aprons have been a problem, becoming boggy and clogged with moisture. Now we have our own digger, primary drainage ditches have been dug in the affected areas and filled with pea shingle to assist drainage. Late summer these areas will be deep tined and back filled with sand for secondary drainage. The greens are basically excellent and, apart from the usual annual treatment, will be deep scarified in the late summer to reduce a build-up of thatch that is prevalent on all but the fifth green.

A budget of £10,000 has been approved this year to reconstruct 80% of the course pathways, which have become so muddy through the winter. A huge amount of work was carried out during the winter months, tidying up the course environs and copses to a much-improved and acceptable standard. My sincere thanks to all the green staff and volunteer workforce on their sterling work. Well done and thank you.

I have a feeling that as a result of all this work we will have a truly marvellous course over the next two seasons. And it doesn't stop there. We are planning to create grass tees on all par 4s and 5s that will be playable 365 days a year. This will mean enlarging some existing tees in order to move tee off areas to ensure even wear. We are investigating large all-weather tees for winter use on the par 3s and continuing to reconstruct bunkers where required.

Club house

Then there is our club house, which is looking tired. We are obtaining quotations to treat and repaint outside surfaces this summer. The approach to the front door needs to be made more welcoming. The changing rooms and washing facilities are all ten years old and, along with the club house internals, require a revamp. We hope to achieve much of this over the next three years but, of course, it will depend on generating the necessary revenue.

Your general management team, bar, kitchen, greens and pro-shop staff worked effectively and efficiently, alongside all those who gave their time voluntarily for competition and committee work, to bring home figures for year-ending 2010 that yielded a small surplus and a positive cash flow.

Though not rich, your Club has clean books, with all dubious capital items written off to revenue and all hire purchase agreements fulfilled by the end of February 2012, and some cash in the bank. There are no loans. So we have a good base on which to go forward.

The golf club sector is very difficult and it will not ease for at least another couple of years. So we have to stay ahead of the rest to survive these difficult times. It is an opportunity to rebrand Mid-Herts by creating unique selling features and emphasising existing ones - things such as creating grass tees that can stand up to use 365 days per year and things like underlining our turn up and play philosophy - creating an environment where all can really enjoy golf on our great course.

We are a members club, that's you and me, and some of you may want to get more involved than at present. If you want to get involved, you are more than



welcome. Phil Bunbury's working parties meet every Wednesday afternoon until the clocks go forward and are a good form of exercise and camaraderie - and he may even buy you a beer and a sandwich to boot.

If you fancy deeper involvement, there are vacancies arising on both the Captains and Greens committees, and a vacancy will occur on your Board. What about some younger blood on the Board? Sorely needed will be someone with marketing experience. If you are interested, please see and speak to a current committee or Board member, you will be made most welcome.

Please make a note in your diary to attend the AGM on 17 April when you can learn more about your club and its performance.

Enjoy your golf.

From the Chair of Greens **Paul Dugdale**

You will have seen that the crew has been very busy leafing and clearing the course and it's all looking remarkably tidy. The greens and tees are in great condition for the time of year.

In February we will continue with our bunker programme. The Board has agreed an ongoing budget over five years to redo all the bunkers and improve and relay tees where necessary. We trialled work on the 7th to make sure we were satisfied with the execution of our ideas and the quality of the work.

We now plan to refurbish the 2nd and 8th. On the 2nd, we intend to split the large front bunker with all its problems into two large bunkers with a gap between them. We will change the left bunker by making it deeper and reducing the sand bank from the front of it. We will also improve the mounding at the back left as this is in need of some care.

We propose to level the 8th tee height to remain as it is at the back now (i.e. you will still see the bottom of the flag) and also to bring it forward three meters to accommodate a possible future ladies' medal tee. The bunkers will be reshaped and drained. The left bunker will go lower and more parallel to the green. The right will be reduced from the right but the front lip will be removed.

Details of this work are on the notice board. The work should be finished during March and we hope all bunkers will be back in play by June/July.

The plan for next year 2012 is to work on holes 9, 13 and 16.

We will also try during this year to renovate all our pathways, starting with the area around the 6th tee.

As you will have noticed we are doing a substantial amount of work on drainage around the greens (for more detail on this please ask myself or Jody). This is going very well. However, it means we have substantial amounts of wastage soil. You will see areas being leveled, grass bunkers being reshaped etc. with this soil. All these areas will be shaped and covered with better topsoil and will be seeded

at the appropriate time so that these unsightly piles will soon become nicely grassed areas. We now own a digger which has enabled us to be much more proactive with this sort of work.

We have recently had a visit from the local trees and woodland department to get advice on our maintenance programme. We will thin some of the oaks in the area left of the men's 15th tee, in the copse on the corner of 15 and between the 5th green and first fairway (to allow more light onto the 5th green).

Overall, we anticipate a very busy and progressive year, getting Mid-Herts nearer to being the best short course in the county. With our great greens, tees, new presentation, car park and new paths, we will become a course of choice.

Copse Clearance Programme **Phil Bunbury**

The copse clearance work has been a members' winter project for a few years now. Widely seen by people as a neglected area of the course for too long, this initiative was to counter slow play in looking for balls; reduce the unsightliness of areas being overtaken by weed; and to encourage the circulation of air to greens and tees.

This winter the copse clearance work has so far been limited to removal of the dreaded scrub holly and bramble from the area far left up 3 and first left down 4. Though not a recipient of too many wayward golf balls, nevertheless its unsightliness would have become very noticeable in a couple of years.

Disappointing, though, has been the turnout this year of working parties. Just think, cardiovascular exercise, without over exertion, see rewards for endeavours, find balls a plenty, logs, and even a monetary reward - all for turning out in a Wednesday afternoon between 1-4, between October and March when the clocks change.

From the Chair of the Social Committee **John Tanner**

The first event in **February** is the popular draw night on the 11th. More than 130 members and guests attended the January draw present and it is hoped that the same number will attend this month.

Saturday 19 March is the Irish evening, tickets are on sale at £25 each. We have booked a 4 piece Irish band plus caller and Alan's menu, 2 courses and coffee, will reflect traditional Irish fare.

Tuesday 5 April is the date of the second of the Supper Lectures. We are delighted to say that Sir Alexander Graham has agreed to talk around and about his year as Lord Mayor of London. Mike, who many will know is a member here and his talk is eagerly anticipated. Tickets are on sale now at £13.50 which includes a 2 course supper and coffee. Tickets are selling fast especially to those members who live in Whitwell.

There is a further chance for members to win the members draw as there is an additional Draw Night on **Friday 8 April**. The draw will be slotted into one of Dave's popular Pub Quiz evenings.



30 April is the Spanish Themed Evening with a classical guitarist and flamenco dancers. Alan's menu, as with the Irish Night, will reflect regional cuisines.

14 May is Captain's Day with a BBQ during lunchtime and starting again at 4pm until 7.30pm.

3 June is the last Draw Night for the season and will incorporate a Golfer/Non-golfer competition, along the same lines as the one held last year.

7 June The final Supper Lecture evening will take the form of a demonstration of the skills of the Metropolitan Police dogs and their handlers. This evening will be in aid of Linda's Lady Captain's Charity. The food for the evening will be a BBQ and it is hoped that the demonstration of skills will take place outside.

We are in the preliminary stages of organising Peter's Midsummer Ball. This is to be held on 25 June

No social events are planned for July and August and the first one in **September is on the 10th** which is the Barn Dance and BBQ.

Please note that coffee and tea is now available at the bar.

News from our talented players on tour

Tom Shadbolt had his first professional tournament at the Joburg Open at the Royal Johannesburg and Kensington Golf Club on 13 January. Despite a good second round, he just missed the cut by one shot. Since then he has come 6th in a Spanish Hi-5 tour event and plans to go there again shortly. The Challenge tour starts in March and he will be taking part in many of those events. Last week he won the Brocket Hall Pro-am with a score of 2 under par.

Lucy Williams competed in the Portuguese Ladies Amateur Open Championship at Aroeira Golf Course. She had a good first round but did not fare so well in the inclement weather which followed. Lucy plans to go to Spain twice in the next month to compete in tournaments, the second one being the Spanish Ladies Amateur Championship.

2011 is a key year for **Rob Leonard**. As a full-time PGA Professional Golfer, it is his aim to be ready for the Challenge Tour or European Tour next year.

To achieve this he will be playing on the Euro Pro Tour www.europrotour.com the Jamega Tour www.jamegatour.co.uk and various Pro/Ams www.pga.info

These tournaments can be expensive with entries, accommodation, equipment and travel all adding up. Rob is looking for sponsorship. Becoming associated with him at this early stage will create a unique partnership which will be a cost-effective form of marketing for businesses or beneficial for individuals.

Please contact Rob for more information. Tel: 07983 520088 or email: robleonardpga@hotmail.co.uk

Jack Woods will be increasing the amount of golf he plays this year, looking to build on a good first year as a professional. He will continue playing in the Herts Alliance pro-ams, for which your continued support would be greatly appreciated. He will also continue to play in the East Region events as well as the Jamega.

Hannah Burke is coming to the end of her studies in Texas - Graduation is in May. At present she is doing a term of coaching at another university in Texas as part of her course. She has qualified to play in the Duramed Futures Tour in the States, but she needs to turn professional to play in the tournaments. For that she needs sponsorship, an agent and a working visa (as opposed to student visa) and all those will have to wait until she finishes at Baylor.

Congratulations to **Tom Lewis**, for a long time a member here, who has made the cut on the Dubai Desert Classic. In the middle of the third round he is tied 57th, the only amateur.

We wish all our stars the best of luck in their golf this year.