

## **AGM 2026 – Proprietor’s Report**

### **Vice Presidents, Captains, Vice-Captains, fellow Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Firstly, thank you all for making a special effort to attend this evening’s AGM. I know there has been a lot going on since the last meeting, and everyone will be keen to hear of any updates. My report tonight is divided into three parts. Firstly, I will begin with a recap of how circumstances led us to where we are regarding the ongoing potential development for the land here at Bromsgrove Golf Centre, together with what we know to date. This will then be followed by a general review of our business operations and changes within our team, before finishing off with an update of the range and golf course.

#### **Firstly: Land Promotion and Development Update**

As many of you already know, in 2017, following years of declining membership and genuine fears for the business’s future, we, the owners, began to explore alternative options for the land here at Bromsgrove Golf Centre. It was at this point that we made the difficult, but obvious decision to offer our site for potential future development, particularly in light of Bromsgrove’s acute housing needs.

Following careful consideration, we entered into a long-standing contractual agreement with **Blenheim Strategic Partners** (BSP), a highly respected land promoter based in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. When Bromsgrove District Council issued a ‘Call for Sites’ in 2017, BSP submitted a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment on our behalf. This was openly shared with staff, the committee, members, and the wider public at the time.

Our recent inclusion in the Council’s Draft Development Strategy is the natural progression of that submission. You may wonder why our land has been shortlisted; indeed, in our early discussions with specialists, they remarked that they had rarely seen such an ideally situated site. It sits in a sustainable location on the edge of town, in close proximity to the centre with exceptionally strong transport links. These factors combined are likely to explain the Council's current interest, and the site's inclusion in the Draft Development Strategy.

However, it is important to understand the broader context of why we are on this path. While golf has seen a welcome resurgence since the pandemic, and it may seem from the outside as though the business is highly profitable, the truth is our operating costs are worryingly high and are increasing at a rate never seen before. Any increase in profits gained from new initiatives are quickly swallowed up by rising overheads such as energy costs, staffing, and National Insurance. A recent review on our financial performance up to the end of December, confirmed what we already knew, that although we have seen good revenue growth, this is dwarfed by the increase in expenditure. These financial pressures are relentless and starting to impact our profits, which now look set to be down year on year.

Regarding membership fees this coming season, we are mindful of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the golf centre and greatly value your continued loyalty. Our intention had been to once again keep increases to a minimum this year and keep them below competitor clubs. However, given the current financial pressures, it is anticipated that membership fees will need to be adjusted in line with similar clubs in the region.

Meanwhile, we remain sincerely grateful for your continued understanding, and unwavering support as we navigate these challenging times together.

As the Council's process moves forward, so does the preparation being undertaken by Blenheim, and since last July, you will have noticed increased activity on-site with all the detailed surveying work going on. All locations earmarked in the Draft Strategy - including ours continue to undergo various assessments. For the golf centre specifically, an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required due to the size and sensitive nature of our site. BSP will be looking to seek a ruling from the Council on this, as it is a crucial process to ensure any planning decisions are made with full knowledge of any environmental consequences.

Regarding the timescale, the planning process remains lengthy and complex, and as our Club Captain said within the Midlands Golfer magazine article, where he reported as spokesperson for the working Party, it could take 10 years from now, not overnight as many are led to believe. To use Lee's reassuring words, at the moment there is still job security for staff and rounds for the golfers.

With regards to the Club's Working Group, **full credit** to those involved who organised themselves so efficiently and have been instrumental in the high volume of responses sent to the Council. The Council now faces an enormous task in sifting through this data, and judging by previous delays, they may struggle to meet their own deadlines.

Nevertheless, regardless of the Council's timeline, the process will continue to be advanced by our Land Promoters who are currently in the stages of preparing a planning proposal. Prior to submitting this with Bromsgrove Planners, Blenheim will need to undertake a Pre-Application Consultation, which they aim to begin in the early part of this year.

To clarify, a Pre-application consultation (or "pre-app") is an informal discussion with the local planning authority to get early feedback on the project's feasibility and likely outcome. This also involves mandatory community engagement to gather public views, where local residents and stakeholders are consulted to address concerns. This part of the process will be led by Cavendish, who are communication consultants, and we understand are handling the process on behalf of Blenheim.

As you are no doubt aware, we entered a legally binding contract with our land promoters which is not retractable, our hands are tied and with restrictions attached. While we are in communication with them, we do not have any direct influence over a future plan. For those wishing to raise their concerns, the upcoming public consultation remains the most effective way for members and the public to help shape any future development.

Despite these long-term discussions, we can assure you that for us, it is **business as usual**. Our management team remains fully committed to maintaining our high standards, with the aim of providing you with the confidence to enable you to keep enjoying the facilities we offer.

### **Business & Operational Update**

Moving to our daily operations, we have recently seen some significant changes in our senior team. While we were sad to see Mark Cunningham leave us after 30 years of dedicated service, we are excited by the fresh ideas and leadership that our new Head Greenkeeper brings. **Adam Baldwin** comes with many years of experience and already has a crucial understanding of our greens having supported us over the past few years with our fertiliser requirements. This was a perfect appointment, as Adam was already familiar with our staff and our maintenance programme.

Shortly after, **Phil Richardson** took up the position of Assistant Head Greenkeeper. Phil also brings a wealth of experience, having previously worked at Puckrup Hall and latterly The Worcestershire. Both have fully embraced their roles and are already demonstrating positive progress. Their proactive approach is proving instrumental in driving improvements across the board and reflects their dedication to enhancing both the playing surface and overall course conditions, as well as motivating our relatively new team of greenkeepers and fostering a culture of high standards.

Prior to joining us, negotiations with Adam were far from easy, as he was insistent that he would only consider the role if we invested in a **Pro-core machine**. This was essential to help bring the course back to good condition following the long, hot summer. Although a costly piece of equipment, there was logic in his reasoning, as is evident from the positive feedback we are getting from members regarding the improvements. In November, both these chaps attended the Committee's monthly management meeting to outline their planned improvements for the coming year and answer questions, which proved to be a very productive session.

Another massive change followed **Sean Cunning's** notice of retirement last year. Sean served us well, managing the bar and restaurant, but with rising costs, we felt there was an opportunity here to maintain a tighter control on overheads. The answer was within. **Sarah Tyler**, who already controls our accounts, finance, and HR, was the natural choice having already demonstrated the skills needed to take on these responsibilities. This has resulted in her promotion to **Assistant General Manager**. Under her leadership, **Michelle and Stacey** have been elevated to Senior Bar Managers, and David, Grace and Chloe are now Bar Managers. This new structure ensures that a manager of the team is always on duty to provide leadership throughout all shifts where our bar team continue to work incredibly hard to provide a great customer experience.

This new structure has enabled Mark, our invaluable General Manager to now focus more on the day-to-day demands of the business that he already excels at, and provide our members with the best quality experience possible. Together, Mark and Sarah make a formidable and incredibly efficient team, proving effective at responding to any daily needs and allowing Adam and myself to step back from the day-to-day operations. I would like to take this moment to thank them both personally for their continued dedication and hard work.

Finally, I must recognise other areas of our business that deserve a mention. Our golf receptionists, led by the very capable **Sue Maddocks**, continue to adapt to the many upgrades to the centre, including the additional services we now provide following the introduction of Trackman.

Our kitchen, under the guidance of **Laura Middleton**, continues to cater for an increasingly diverse range of businesses while providing an enhanced service. This is visible through the general increase in trade, and as evident at the Presentation Evening, where members sat down to a superb two-course meal.

Our kitchen has also undergone a couple of upgrades. Firstly, to maintain our high safety standards, a new fire suppression system was installed, and we upgraded the kitchen's bain marie due to the reliability of the existing model. I'm pleased to report that an unexpected visit by the Food Standards Agency still led to us retaining our valued 5-star rating

## **Facilities Update**

Moving on to provide an update on our facilities, we are pleased to inform you that recent trials on our new Range Bay Food Ordering App have been successful, with all features operating smoothly. This new service will further enhance your Trackman experience following the soft launch in December that saw the breakfast bap menu and a selection of drinks, exclusively delivered to the range bays by the clubhouse team. This is a service we intend to expand on in the coming months.

The golf range robots went live in June and up until recently were collecting balls 24 hours a day, supported by the mower bot, which cuts the range outfield without the need to remove all balls beforehand. The collected balls are then deposited into a trap at the far end of the range before being sucked down to a new ball wash machine, which then delivers them to the main hopper by compressed air. All automated and very slick during the dry periods, but with many challenges this time of year.

Despite changing the golf range floodlights just three years ago at a significant expense, we began to notice that they were flickering. Upon closer inspection, we realised they were all starting to fail. However, the supplier agreed to provide replacements for the faulty lights which have now been changed

On the golf course, as you know, prior to the winter 5 more winter mats were installed, with plans to extend them to all holes this coming year.

You may have also noticed that several areas have been roped off, particularly those prone to holding surface water. This helps protect the course, which is essential to put us in a good place going into the new season. The course seems to be holding up quite well at the moment considering the amount of rainfall, which is 110mm so far this month.

Tree work in the form of thinning continues to take place, focusing on areas that benefit the course most, such as around greens which have restricted airflow and therefore are more susceptible to disease. Pathway work, and bunker improvements will continue when the weather is more suitable. And the red posts surrounding the lake are to be replaced as are the safety aids.

Our immediate plan on the course, when the weather allows, is to carry out a monthly aeration program using a verti-drain alongside the normal pro-core and slitting practices. This will then be followed by a machine to inject compressed air deep into the soil to help fracture any underlying compaction.

Golf Course machinery is in the stages of having their winter service and cutting reels sharpened, and we are in the process of assessing the irrigation system with some immediate repairs to attend to.

So, as you can see, we are continuing to invest in the course regardless of the underlying matters.

In summary, while we navigate the complexities of the local development plan, our focus remains on the present, the team and community that make this club what it is. We will continue to update you as significant developments occur. In the meantime, thank you for your continued loyalty and for your attendance this evening.

Philip Morris

Proprietor / Club President