



Woodland Management Report Summary – July 2016

INTRODUCTION

John Nicholson Associates (Arboricultural Consultants) were asked to produce a plan that identifies the existing tree cover and details the management required to ensure their sustainability. The trees and woodlands are an intrinsic element of the golf course, helping form the landscape in which golf is played. Management is vital to ensure their potential is realised and their long-term future safeguarded.

Tree planting on golf courses often occurs without consideration to the subsequent size of the tree or their effect on the strategy of a hole. The trees are constantly developing but the slow rate of change often goes undetected by those who view them every day. As they grow the trees encroach on play creating congestion resulting in slow play as players look for balls that ricochet or are hidden amongst leaves.

Bramhall golf course was laid out on agricultural land in 1905 and has many of the fine mature oaks that were part of the original landscape giving it a distinct parkland character. If the course is to reach its true potential, then efforts have to be made to return the parkland character. Parklands feature large specimen trees and natural copses in organic shapes.

MANAGEMENT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Maintain and enhance the quality of the golf course

- To protect the golfing strategy of holes by creating sustainable woodland cover.
- To improve the quality of grass sward by managing the trees and woodland.
- To stop encroachment into the line of play.
- To enhance the character of individual holes.

B. Maintain and enhance the long-term landscape value of the course.

- Bring existing woodlands into management so their long-term impact on the landscape can be preserved.
- To expose the more attractive parkland trees
- To provide a unified landscape character

C. Enhance the value of the course for wildlife.

- Utilise native species.
- Thin existing woodland where appropriate to encourage development of natural regeneration of tree species and ground flora and a more diverse canopy structure.

D. Ensure safety of members, guests and employees.

- Fell or make safe trees identified as potentially unsafe.

SUMMARY

Bramhall golf course has some magnificent specimen trees and a definite parkland character. If the course is to reach its true potential then these features need to be emphasised. A more open landscape character will also benefit the agronomy of the course as it will dry quicker in winter due to increased light and air and the grass sward will not be stressed through competition for water and nutrient in dry conditions.

Recent decades have seen a natural increase in tree cover as regeneration of self-seeded oak and sycamore has occurred. Whilst trees and woodlands are now part of the character of the landscape and strategy of the course, care must be taken to preserve the individuality of each hole and emphasise the better specimens.

Extensive planting with Pine has occurred throughout the course without ongoing management in the intervening years, thus thinning is required in order to allow the remaining trees to reach their potential and to avoid wind-blow.

Further planting with predominantly birch has been done filling any gaps between existing copses. This has led to a linear unnatural appearance in many areas. Fairways lined with symmetric stands of trees remove the character of individual holes leading to a loss of variety and a weakening of the strategy. It can cause slow play and a very penal strategy with little opportunity for recovery. Further the density of planting means that there is little or no grass beneath the trees creating lies on either mud or roots neither of which are desirable.

Poplars are normally planted for their rapid growth. They are fast growing but have a relatively short life span. Commercial hybrid poplars have a rotation age of 40 years that means that beyond this point they will deteriorate very quickly. Furthermore they are unsuitable for golf courses as their surface rooting habit often results in damage to expensive machinery. It should also be noted that poplar roots can be found at a spread of up to 2.8 times the height of the tree and therefore extensive damage can occur in areas thought to be well removed from the tree. It is recommended any poplars are removed.

It is often mistakenly thought that trees will solve drainage problems by soaking up water in wet areas. Although they are high water demanders, short mown grass will normally require more water than a tree. Further, they will always find the easiest source of water, normally field drains, and will therefore compound drainage problems by creating blockages. It is not uncommon to find 40m of fibrous root completely blocking a drain.

Copses normally require thinning 10 to 15 years after planting once the canopy begins to close. This will ensure that the trees produce an attractive branch free stem that is beneficial to both players and greens staff. Thinning too early will produce shrubby scrub type trees with many low branches. Thinning too late will result in drawn trees that will be liable to wind blow or wind snap.

The removal of stunted stems and those of poor form will concentrate future growth on better, more attractive trees, particularly around tees and greens. Tree removal will allow better light penetration and air circulation that will improve the quality of the grass sward. Stumps will need to be removed along the edges to ensure mowing can take place.

It should be an aim to have a net loss of trees but a net gain in quality. The trees that remain should be the larger parkland species that harmonise with the landscape. This would allow a better strategy to be created without compromising the landscape character. This would also benefit maintenance, as mowing time and leaf drop would be reduced and air and light would be increased to the playing surfaces.

IMPLEMENTATION / NEXT STEPS

This is viewed as a 5 to 10 year project which will be split into phases. The Greens Committee will select which parts of the detailed report will be implemented and agree it with Handicap.

To keep costs down the aim to do as much of the work as possible using our own staff but some specialist external expertise and resource will be required

Detail of the actual work to be done in each phase will be communicated in advance to members.

The first phase will be this winter covering holes 7 & 8 to fit with other renovation work to be done on these holes. A separate document details the tree work for these holes.

November 2016