

FUTURE-PROOF IRRIGATION:

Why hybrid systems are helping clubs upgrade their infrastructure at their own pace

It's a common misconception that altering, extending or redesigning areas of a golf course always requires ripping out and replacing most, if not all, of the existing irrigation system.

A hybrid option offers clubs the freedom and flexibility to plan system upgrades and course changes on a hole-by-hole basis.

With over 30 years of international irrigation industry experience, Stuart Tate has worked on some of the largest irrigation projects in the UK and mainland Europe. He outlines the benefits that many courses can realise from a hybrid solution unique to Rain Bird.

"Let's talk about what's already in place first. Any Rain Bird irrigation system can be upgraded. It's as simple as that. It doesn't need to be ripped out and completely replaced. Our technologies available from the 1980's right up to the

present day — satellite (hard wired), satellite decoder, decoder and IC - can be upgraded independently and yet still be controlled from the same central control software on one PC. New technologies will improve the efficiency of any system, saving water, labour, time, energy and money. A review will uncover any weaknesses and identify where upgrades will add value."

The launch of the Rain Bird IC System a decade ago heralded a new era in irrigation technology. Simple and expandable, with no satellites or hubs (so therefore up to 90% less wire), and no decoders, it revolutionised the way water is managed on golf courses.

"Every golf course is different, but hybrid irrigation solutions suit almost all situations. There's a huge financial advantage in carefully phasing renovations as it's less disruptive to play



and allows costs to be spread out over a longer period. The best approach is to think about any renovation project in discrete phases. Course areas can be altered or extended and you can upgrade a number of holes to an IC System while retaining existing decoders.

"Timeless Compatibility means all Rain Bird Golf products use the same wiring, valve technology and communication protocols. The benefit for the system user is having the ability to upgrade specific course areas no matter what's in place and then easily run all the different technologies from one PC. They don't have to worry about running different PC's and programmes independently, which is more complex and time consuming."

Links hybrid plays major role in sustainability strategy

A hybrid system at Ballybunion Golf Club in Ireland is enabling Course Manager John Bambury CGCS to deliver the club's vision for sustainable links management. In 2018, an ageing decoder system on the Old Course was upgraded to an IC System with Nimbus II Central Control, which operates alongside the decoder system on the Trent Jones

Cashen Course.

The new system, designed by AMA's Adrian Mortram and installed in phases by OCMIS, includes targeted watering to fairways, tee areas and walkways, back to back rotors on the greens surrounds, and new infrastructure, including pump station, tanks, boreholes and wells, to meet the needs of both courses.

The Central Control running the IC System wasn't located where the old PC running the decoder system was, so the two were centralised to run all 36 holes on one PC through a remote fibre-optic link.

John said: "We are incredibly focused on managing our golf courses in the most sustainable way possible. When our irrigation technician, Shane Kenny, and I were researching the project, we wanted to partner with a company that understood our commitment to sustainable links management.

"The upgrade has expanded our ability to irrigate areas of the course while using less water, by applying it in an economical and environmentally sensitive manner. Our triple row fairway design ensures we are not throwing excess water into native rough areas and helps promote a finer sward of deep rough. On the rest of the course we can



apply moisture to surfaces with incredible accuracy, which promotes finer grasses, such as fescue. Our management is centred on wetting agents and seaweed products and having the right irrigation infrastructure helps us get the most from our low-nutrient programme."

Having one central control and one pump station has delivered efficiencies across both courses and provides scope for the upgrading of the Cashen Course at a later time.

Technology making a real difference

Stuart Tate says the flexibility the hybrid system offers has given clubs the opportunity to approach renovation projects with greater confidence,

something that is likely to become an even more important factor in uncertain times.

"Once you have an IC System in the ground, the irrigation technology is future-proofed. The control of many other course features can be brought into it and automated with a remote-control facility, including transfer pumps, aeration and lighting.

"Taking the latest irrigation technology to any size of project is going to offer every course tangible advantages for the short term and for many years to come."

