

FUTURISTIC INVESTMENT BENEFITS WOKING'S GOLFERS TODAY

6th hole at Woking GC by Jason Livy Photography

When Andy Ewence joined Woking Golf Club as course manager three years ago, his ambition was to steer this highly-rated course towards an even better standard of conditioning, leaving a legacy that would benefit golfers well into the 2050's.

Within weeks he discovered an existing irrigation system in poor shape, with deteriorating PVC piping, rotors manufactured by Bear redundant a decade ago, and a computer system no longer supported by software updates. Without detailed information about the location of cable paths and cable joints that weren't waterproof, faults occurred every time the system was operational. Grass coverage was continually lost, partly due to sprinkler configuration, so all fairways had to be overseeded regularly, with repair costs spiralling to over £20,000 a year.

A year earlier, irrigation consultant Roger Davey of Irritech Limited carried out an appraisal and in 2018 completed detailed design and full irrigation system tender specification.

He explained: "Woking Golf Club was ahead of the crowd in tackling water sourcing and storage, utilising an existing bore hole and creating a water storage lake. They took the long view and did their due diligence. The system design

addresses the hydraulic challenges of an undulating site across a very large area, rising to 20 to 30 metres at the 9th and 10th holes. That variance has been managed so even coverage is achieved on fine turf areas but water is conserved. The solution achieves uniformity of coverage and maximises irrigation efficiency. It comes down to three essentials — control, nozzle selection and system management. There are clubs ripping out much newer and cheaper systems, redundant sprinklers

and valve boxes that are simply not fit for purpose."

With an independent design specification completed, a substantial number of members helped finance the investment and with generous support, the club stepped forward with confidence.

Installation of a Rain Bird IC System with Stratus II Central Control and 875 Rain Bird rotors began in October 2019 and was completed in May 2020, with Rain Bird 751 and 950 Series

valve-in-head rotors on greens, tees, approaches and lawns and a triple row system on fairways to avoid watering the surrounding heather.

Contractor MJ Abbott faced unusually challenging circumstances, as Technical Director Adrian Abbott explained:

"Installation had gone entirely to plan, with just the pump station left to install, and then along came COVID-19.

"UK Government guidelines for safe working in close proximity meant instead of a team of four, we could only have one, sometimes two on site. I was acutely aware of the need to get the project over the line so we had to be innovative and adapt our approach very quickly.

"Fortunately, MJ Abbott has a number of portable pump stations, one of which was temporarily installed at the water storage lake, some 500 metres from the pump station location, to enable us to pump water onto the course. We were then able to fully commission the irrigation system and hand it over before then building the permanent pump station and swapping it over. We were 100% committed to finding a way through, because having no irrigation in the record-breaking dry spring would have been catastrophic for the club and the heather work completed over winter which needed irrigating".

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Andy Ewence said about the project: "An irrigation system is one of the largest investments a club ever makes.

"My aim was to have the safest, most future-proof system available. Paperless, fully computerised, using the latest touchscreen and mobile technology. And we've got that. We're totally teched-up!

"We have a 60-inch screen in the office for mapping, a smaller computer in the team tea room, a laptop and mobile making accessing the system easy and an immediate and direct line of communication, straight from PC to rotor

head. When I come in at 5.30am, I can do a full system test in minutes. We've got complete confidence in the new IC System because it works, it's safe and it's reliable."

Results on the course are both performance-enhancing as well as visible.

Andy added: "The difference is astounding. All the surfaces are green and there are no bare patches at all. We're achieving excellent distribution, a better, closer cut which means a consistent speed on greens. The head professional has had lots of positive feedback and there's now a waiting list of people wanting to join. The committee, captain and members have been hugely supportive and interested in the new irrigation system. And what's exciting for our team is that we're still learning and tweaking the system."

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Andy monitors individual rotors and system performance from touch screen mapping in his office, and remotely on a mobile device.