

Golf in England has never before faced so many difficult challenges and in such a short space of time as it has done since restrictions were put in place to combat the threat of COVID-19.

The unprecedented, but necessary, decision to close golf courses from 23 March has had a profound effect on our game.

This was not a call we took pleasure in making – however, it remains the correct and responsible decision during a global pandemic and at a time of national emergency.

Throughout this period of disruption, however, England Golf has never shied away from facing this crisis head on by working for and on behalf of our clubs and counties.

Much of this work has, necessarily, gone on quietly behind the scenes.

Even though we took the decision to furlough the majority of our staff, a core workforce has remained to act on behalf of our stakeholders and champion golf's cause while being respectful of the wider public health concerns.

From the outset, we have worked in partnership with the other home unions, industry partners, The R&A and collaboratively with the PGA, BIGGA and GCMA on a number of golf-related matters.

One example is the production of an 'essential maintenance guide' for greenkeepers in order that courses may be cared for at a level that will allow the game to return when it is safe to do so.

We have also been proactive in our dealing with government and, in particular, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Topics have included:

- Making our view clear to the DCMS on the issue of public access to golf course land
- Lobbying government on the rateable value loophole that has prevented golf clubs potentially accessing funds

Of course, there remains a great appetite to discover the date when it may be safe for golf to return.

England Golf will continue to work in support of government and with them to move towards that day.

When golf does return, this great game of ours must be ready to do so in an organised and responsible manner.

The enthusiasm for golf's return after an enforced hiatus is to be embraced.

However, it is important that everyone who loves the game is guided by the simple message – **Play Safe, Stay Safe.**

England Golf will soon provide golf clubs with a series of guides to help plan the final steps on the journey back to playing the game.

While we cannot yet circle a date in the diary, it is right to put in place a proper framework to allow golfers to tee it up at the appropriate time and with the necessary infrastructure already in place.

The following areas will be covered:

- Golfer communications
- Staff and volunteers
- Ongoing business support
- Facility and course management
- Playing the game

It is realistic for golf clubs to expect restrictions on opening of facilities, requirements for social distancing and adaptations to the usual playing etiquette even after any easing of lockdown.

Restarting the game on this basis will be a challenge. There is a key responsibility to balance the issue of public health while at the same time ensuring the vitality of our sport.

Golf will play a prominent role in the nation's sporting recovery - when the time is right.

By working together, we can make sure this happens with our affiliated clubs and counties at the heart of the matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Tomlinson', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jeremy Tomlinson
Chief Executive, England Golf