



Heswall Golf Club

Strategic Business Plan 2023-2027

Planning our future

Presented by Council to Members – November 2022

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Foreword

We have so much to offer as a club – unrivalled practice facilities, a superb and ever-improving golf course, and a great clubhouse with spectacular views. However, it is crucial that as a club we don't stand still. We need to continue to move with the times, be aware that golf clubs around us are constantly looking to improve their product and understand that our members quite rightly expect the highest standards at Heswall throughout the year, both on the course and off.

Council has therefore recently been considering our future organisation, governance, and other decision-making processes, as well as developing a strategic business plan for the club setting out our vision and our strategic objectives and identifying our priorities for the next 5 years.

In developing the plan, we have taken into account members' views expressed via the recent Members' Survey. The survey left us in no doubt that members consider the single biggest priority for the club going forward to be the continued development and improvement of the course – including drainage and bunker work, upgraded tees, and an improved irrigation system. There was also significant recognition in the survey that work in and around the clubhouse is long overdue.

Alongside these proposed major capital investment projects, the plan sets out our intention to improve the club's communication and consultation processes; to maximise both competitive and social golfing opportunities for members; and to enhance members' overall clubhouse experience. Importantly, we want to ensure we continue to provide our members, their families, guests, and visitors with a quality golfing and social experience within a friendly and welcoming environment.

We acknowledge that we have an ambitious agenda to work through and, as we enter a period of global financial uncertainty and a particularly challenging financial period for the club, it is also important that our business plans are considered in the broader financial context in which we will be operating. Therefore, our plans will be kept under regular review, and will remain flexible and subject to change.

We are committed to keeping you fully informed of progress against the plan, and to involving you in the key decisions required in respect of the major capital investment projects and other significant changes. In the meantime, I hope you will take time to study the plan and that you find it helpful in understanding more about the future plans for our great club.

Tony Walker
Chair of Council

Our Vision

To be a premier golf course in the Northwest offering a course that is playable all year round, a clubhouse and golfing experience that exceeds the expectations of members and visitors, and a membership that is strong, diverse, inclusive, welcoming, and friendly.

Our Values

The delivery of our strategic objectives and vision are underpinned by the key values of our Club:

- Be friendly and welcoming to all - whether they are members, guests, visitors, or staff
- Treat all people fairly and with respect
- Act with integrity at all times thus promoting an atmosphere of honesty and trust
- Maintain high standards of behaviour, both on and off the course
- Take pride in our Club and instil it in others
- Promote camaraderie and friendship
- Value the diversity of our membership
- Recognise the contribution made by members, and recognise and celebrate success
- Conduct our business to the highest standards
- Be socially responsible and environmentally friendly

Strategic Objectives

Our overall aim is to provide an all-year-round playing experience that is equal to any club in the region, and to create the right environment for all members and visitors to be able to consistently enjoy the Heswall Golf Club experience.

1. The Course

- Provide a top-quality golf course and year-round playing experience that is the envy of any golf club in the region.
- Continue to be eligible for county, national and international elite-level competitions, whilst offering the appropriate level of challenge and appeal for members of all golfing abilities.

2. The Clubhouse

- Provide a consistent, high quality and cost-effective bar and catering service which supports both golfing and non-golfing activities.
- Provide a welcoming clubhouse atmosphere, set in comfortable and updated surroundings, which encourages greater use by members, their guests, and visitors.

3. Golf

- Provide the appropriate balance of competitions and other organised golf events, and tee availability for members' use for social games, that can be played within a fair, inclusive, and enjoyable environment.

- Provide high quality teaching and practice facilities which support all standards of golfers.

4. Membership

- Retain a full membership base, including by continuing to attract new members in all categories of membership whatever their golfing ability.
- Ensure that new members are fully integrated into club life and are made to feel welcome.

5. Administration and Governance

- Ensure an effective and transparent organisational and best-practice governance structure providing the Club with committees, policies, procedures, and processes administered under the guidance of an elected Council.
- Improve communication and consultation processes between members, Club committees, and Council.

6. Finance and Risk Management

- Safeguard the long-term, continued financial stability and success of the Club by ensuring that annual income generation covers operating costs, routine capital expenditure and debt servicing, and provides some funding to accumulate reserves.
- Prioritise major capital investment projects after full consideration of funding options and members' consultation.

7. Sustainability

- Optimise the playing quality of our golf course whilst protecting its natural environment, and continue to manage it and our clubhouse with a focus on water conservation, energy conservation, alternative energy usage and pollution prevention.

Implementation

What we are planning to do

1. The Course

Major investment has been made in our golf course over the last 12 months or so. The machinery and equipment replacement programme is nearing completion; the green-keeping team is up to complement with a good balance of skills, abilities, background, and age profiles; and significant improvements to the golf course can already be seen. However, further work is still required if we are to be able to present the course in top quality condition year-round, continue to provide a challenge for golfers of all abilities, and attract visitors and golf events that will bring in much needed additional income for the Club.

Therefore, our focus will be to continue with a structured programme of course maintenance and improvement, including:

- Completing the bunker project, renovating the remaining greenside bunkers on 3rd, 5th, and 9th holes, and removing a small number of fairway bunkers as well as the second practice bunker

- Continuing with the planned drainage works, initially on 11th, 15th, and 17th fairways
- Rebuilding tees where required, initially on 1st, 4th, and 13th holes
- Improving the approach to the 1st tee
- Improving the design of the 9th hole - including relocating the Men's blue and white tee areas, reshaping the front of the green, and making changes to the ditch that crosses the fairway
- Installing an upgraded irrigation system covering the greens and approaches, tees, and bunkers.

In the longer term, we also plan to upgrade buildings in the greenkeepers' compound to ensure that equipment and supplies can be safely and securely stored, and to provide modern working conditions for the staff.

2. The Clubhouse

Some members spend as much time in the clubhouse as they do on the golf course. However, for most it's a place to relax and enjoy drinks or food before or after golf, or for enjoying one of the numerous social functions or in-house activities that are organised. It's a crucial part of golf club life and, therefore, it is important that we make the clubhouse as welcoming and as comfortable as possible, and that we provide high quality food, beverages, and service.

A number of initiatives are already underway - a new House Manager is being recruited, performance management procedures for staff have been enhanced, and the training programme for bar and catering staff is under review. An improved menu with varied choices has also been introduced, and a new Social Committee established. Our focus now includes:

- Continuing to improve the consistency in the quality of food and service
- Improving cost control, whilst continuing to offer value for money food and beverages
- Constantly reviewing bar and catering staffing rosters to ensure they reflect customer demand
- Installing a 'service hoist' between the kitchen and lounge to improve food delivery times and overall service quality
- Encouraging greater use of the clubhouse facilities, including by younger members, by providing a broader choice of social events and dining experiences for members
- Promoting the use of the upstairs dining room for upmarket non-member events and functions without affecting golfing activity or the use of the clubhouse by members.

We also plan to:

- Refresh and refit the spike bar/lounge area to modern standards, including redesigning the layout
- In the longer term, consider how to better optimise the use of the upstairs clubhouse rooms for members use, and for external functions
- Re-consider the operation and location of the Oasis as a viable on-course food and beverage option for members.

3. Golf

Building on the Club's existing strengths to deliver open and inclusive golf to meet the needs of all categories of member, it is important that organised competitions continue to reflect members' views on the mix of events throughout the year, balancing individual handicap-qualifying with fun/team competitions. Members also rightly expect that tee availability for general play and social games is taken into consideration, whilst recognising the Club also relies on much-needed additional revenue that it receives from visitor green fees and from organised external golf events.

Members are also now familiar with the World Handicapping System and its impact on handicaps and competition scores, and we need to continue to ensure that our competitive and social golf remains both fair and enjoyable.

Therefore, our focus will include:

- Providing the right mix of competition and social golf to stimulate participation, as well as self-organised play to maintain a club atmosphere and to encourage clubhouse use
- Improving tee availability for members – specific areas that we will address include minimising early morning tee closures; restricting tee times before 9.30am to members only, wherever possible; releasing un-booked competition and external event tee times as early as possible; opening earlier on Maintenance Days where the work programme permits; and restricting the number of those major external golf events each year that significantly restrict members' access to the course
- Ensuring that all members are confident that players' handicaps are accurate, regularly assessed, and adjusted where required
- Encouraging all members and visitors to adhere to good golfing etiquette at all times, including attention to the pace of play.

We also plan to:

- Continue to support and encourage the Club's participation in inter-club matches and other representative competitions
- Promote and celebrate the golfing achievements of our members and the Club's Professionals in both Club and external events
- Enhance the Club's reputation and standing, by ensuring that selective County, National and International golfing competitions continue to be held at Heswall
- Work with the Club Professional and his team to ensure the continued provision of extensive practice facilities, expert tuition, and consistently effective operational support
- Continue to renew our *SafeGolf* accreditation by ensuring policies and procedures remain up to date.

4. Membership

We pride ourselves on our diverse membership base, and our membership is currently strong with a healthy waiting list for interview. Our male membership is currently at capacity, and successful 'Get Into

Golf' events with follow-up mentoring arrangements have seen the number of female members steadily grow during 2022. Junior member numbers have also jumped by almost a third to over 90.

However, we need to be mindful of potential declining membership as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite and membership fees and other costs rise. It is important to ensure that we retain existing members by keeping members involved in decisions about the club's future, as well as finding ways of encouraging our younger members to engage more - not only with on-going club debates and decision-making, but also with social activities away from the golf course, and to help them feel more integrated into club life.

Therefore, in continuing to develop a welcoming, inspiring, and inclusive environment for all our members, our focus will include:

- Considering more direct engagement with members – for example, through more frequent members' meetings, open forums, focus groups, project teams etc., in addition to the Club's committee structure
- When consulting on major projects and other significant decisions, involving as many members as possible from across the whole membership base
- Ensuring there is clearer and more frequent communication of progress against plans
- Encouraging active participation in golfing and social events, and in the Club committees
- Achieving a fair and balanced representation on Council and across the Club's committees that reflects the diversity of our overall membership
- Building on the success of our 3 welcome evenings and the 'Get Into Golf' mentor scheme, continuing to develop ways of supporting new members – for example, by providing mentoring or, in the case of those new members who are without sponsors or who are inexperienced golfers, specific support
- Conducting exit interviews with members who choose to leave the Club so as to understand their reasons.

We will also:

- Redesign and relaunch the *Have Your Say / Suggestions Box* scheme to encourage greater use by members, and to make it easier to access and to search for a particular topic
- Continuously review our *Women in Golf* Charter commitments to ensure our continued year-on-year accreditation
- Undertake our second Members Survey during the summer of 2023.

5. *Governance and Administration*

Governance

The Club Rules have been in place for many years, and there are many Club policies and procedures that have been developed that are documented in a stand-alone document or even only in Council minutes. Council has therefore begun a review of these and other Club governance arrangements. This work will continue over the coming months with our focus to include:

- A major review of the Club Rules

- The consolidation and publication of the Club’s existing policies and procedures
- The development of a Code of Conduct for members, visitors, and staff as well as a comprehensive Grievance, Complaints and Discipline Policy and associated procedural guidance, which will give greater clarity and consistency into what we all expect from members’ and others’ behaviour
- A review of the Terms of Reference of each Club committee, as well as that of its Chair, to ensure these roles are up to date and focused.

We also plan to:

- Establish a succession plan for Committee Chair vacancies to help ensure that nominations are received from as broad a range of suitable candidates as possible and in a timely way
- Ensure commercial contracts are thoroughly reviewed and that due diligence checks are carried out before the Club undertakes any significant capital investment projects
- Continue with our review and evaluation of the Club’s legal status, with consideration given to incorporation status being established.

Administration

Whilst the management of the Club is vested in Council, we are very much supported in this by our General Manager and other senior staff including the Course Manager, House Manager and the Professional. Our collective aim is to provide an efficient Club administration system that supports members as well as the secure and effective management of the Club’s affairs and finances by employing well-trained staff. We always seek professional advice (legal or otherwise) when dealing with specialised processes, and remain compliant with relevant legislation at all times.

We have recently reviewed office roles and organisation to ensure optimum staffing levels and working arrangements are met and, whilst the office will continue to operate an ‘open door’ policy for members’ enquiries, it is important that members understand the workload undertaken by the General Manager and the office team. As well as day-to-day financial and administrative duties, and supporting Council and the Club’s committees, their future focus will include:

- Upgrading the Club’s public and members website pages
- Maximising our use of a wide range of social media channels
- Rolling out an integrated IT business solution for members across bar and catering, membership, clubhouse access, and golf activity.

6. Finance and Risk Management

The Club is facing significant financial challenges over the next year or so. Inflation is currently hovering around 10% meaning that our day-to-day running costs have increased. However, the cost of some essential items required for routine course maintenance has risen by much more than this – for example, bunker sand now costs 15% more than last year, top dressing an extra 20%, and fertiliser has more than doubled in price. Our fixed-price energy deal finishes soon and, even with the government support

package announced recently, our electricity and gas bills are expected to more than double in 2023. The recent rise in interest rates means repayment of our bank loan is more expensive, and annual pay awards for staff each April will also need to reflect the increased cost of living.

The club also requires some significant capital investment if we are to keep pace with other golf clubs around us. The decision some 18 months ago to embark on an essential replacement programme for our ageing course maintenance equipment will leave the Club's Development Fund (effectively, our deposit account) running low, and we need to plan now to replenish that over time.

We have begun to offset some of the increases in running costs by increasing green fees for visitors and societies, and we plan to seek selective and discreet sponsorship to improve revenue income for the Club.

Other day-to-day efficiency measures that are planned include:

- Reviewing bar and catering staffing rosters and operating hours
- Ensuring all our lighting is energy efficient and addressing any areas requiring an upgrade
- Ensuring evening events which require catering are cost effective
- Reducing energy waste – for example, by ensuring that lights and external heaters are turned off when not required
- Reviewing our storage charges for clothes, trolleys, and golf clubs as these have not increased in the last 10 years.

We will also:

- Ensure that annual increases in membership subscriptions reflect only what is required to safeguard the long-term, continued financial stability and success of the Club for its members
- Keep all green fee rates and society packages under constant review
- Examine the feasibility and financing options of installing solar panels to offset some electricity costs
- Explore a broad range of the medium and longer-term funding options available to allow us to pursue a phased capital investment programme in the clubhouse and on the course, ensuring that all projects are predicated upon the financial context in which we will be operating.

We will ensure that we only do what we can afford, and that any major alterations or investment will not be made without further consultation with, and the support of, members. Investment in these major improvement projects are also dependant on there being a full membership list for 2023 and beyond, and on interest rates remaining within affordable limits.

7. Sustainability

It is becoming increasingly clear that manicured, unnaturally green golf courses maintained by excessive watering and chemical treatments are not sustainable. This is because there are ever more stringent environmental regulations on the amount of water and pesticides that can be used. In addition, the cost of maintaining a golf course in this way is becoming too great in a competitive market. A sustainable approach takes into account both environmental and economic factors while continuing to aim for high

quality playing surfaces. Sustainable management of a golf course can also increase habitat variety, enhance biodiversity, and protect delicate and rare habitats.

Our Course Manager has already developed an Environmental Management Plan for the course and implemented a number of practices that support sustainability. These include:

- reducing fungicide and other chemical usage on the course
- switching to straight and organic fertiliser
- creating grassland areas throughout the golf course to allow for pollinators and insect species to thrive, with the consequent positive impact on birds
- removing non-native tree species to encourage only native wildlife
- reducing emissions, not only by reducing cutting areas but also through the purchasing of electric course vehicles and hybrid mowers.

Additionally, in the clubhouse, we are already looking at ways of reducing energy usage, including the installation of solar panels, as well as improving our recycling practices. The Club is also now registered on the England Golf Sustainability Database.

Looking ahead, we plan to focus on ensuring that the Club is recognised for enhancing nature, reducing resource consumption, and for taking action for a healthier climate, by:

- Forming a Sustainability Working Group, and appointing a Sustainability Champion
- Producing action plans to support the implementation of identified priorities which improve and further develop sustainable practices at the Club; and
- Working towards achieving awards and recognition for sustainable best practice, including Golf Environment Organisation (GEO) Certification.

8. Measuring Our Success

This 5-year Plan is a high-level strategic document which contains a series of aspirational objectives towards which we are working and which, as a Club, we are hoping to achieve within the lifetime of the Plan. Because of the need to continually assess our financial position, and because we wish to consult widely with members on the major projects, it deliberately does not contain detailed tactical or operational targets, or specific timescales or deadlines.

Our success therefore will largely be measured through the achievement of the supporting actions that are set out in the Plan. For some of these, success will be self-evident – for example, completion of the proposed bunker and drainage work; installation of a service hoist; revised club rules and other governance improvements in place, and so on. On the major projects, when the timing is right, you should expect to see the preparation and presentation of costed proposals, a full consultation process with members, and implementation aligned with members' decisions.

However, the key indicator of our overall success will be evidenced through improved ratings in the annual Member Survey when we all should expect to see year-on-year improvements in the scoring of each of the questions and in the feedback commentary.