

The FUTURE

This book reflects what might be described as **the spirit of Stockport Golf Club** in so many different ways. Since its foundation, the club has been a members' club and those entrusted with running the club have done so for, and on behalf of, the members. Successive captains and Committees have dealt with the wide range of issues which have arisen with foresight, good judgement, sensitivity and considerable business acumen. They have aimed for the highest standards within inevitable financial limitations to provide a quality club for the membership. Many of the club's traditions go back for a hundred years and members continue to support and uphold these, despite the pressures of the modern age.

by **KJ Dargie**

As the club's greatest asset, the course has always been given priority in terms of expenditure, while the clubhouse has been progressively developed and refurbished over the years to ensure that it is a comfortable and well-appointed place for members and guests to enjoy the social aspect of golf, which is such an important element of golf at Torkington. The club insists on employing senior managers (steward, course manager and professional) of the highest calibre who embrace the club ethos and provide essential services of the finest standards. In turn, these managers employ competent staff who display their professionalism in their daily contact with members.

So, adding all these together, Stockport is a first class golf club of which its members are justifiably proud and one which constantly gives members, staff and visitors the highest quality and excellent value year in, year out. While the club can reflect with satisfaction on its past achievements, it cannot be complacent for the future.

Clearly, the priority is to hold on to what the club now has and to continue to build on that strong base. Incoming Committees are reminded of the perils of change, and change for change's sake in particular. Not for the first time, and probably not for the last, the club is financed by a relatively high level of debt which restricts scope for major developments in the near future.

Internal drivers of expenditure are visible every time golf is played or the clubhouse is visited. Maintenance, refurbishment, renewal of equipment, and the upgrading of facilities to take advantage of emerging technology and demands for improvements require high levels of finance. All of these are fulfilled as part of a rolling 5-year plan which has at its heart the avoidance of expenditure which would prove to be only of short-term value.

External drivers are becoming increasingly influential, as has been experienced over the last few years. New legislation emanating from Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg or Westminster impacts on working conditions, employment, health and safety, hygiene, equality and many other issues. The club is already being required to spend in some of these areas to meet its legal obligations which go well beyond the regular certification visits from police and fire authorities. A lavatory for disabled people, kitchen flooring and beer barrel storage are just a few examples of expenditure forced on the club by external developments in 2005, and it is clear that this trend will continue.

Perhaps reflecting the more hostile social environment of present times, security will become an increasingly significant issue. There will be a growing need to safeguard club staff, members, visitors, their property and club assets. This could well necessitate barrier entry and more extensive use of encoded cards, or even measures unthinkable at present.

The astonishing rate of technical development of golf clubs and balls and the increase in physical fitness and strength of the best players in recent years, is putting huge pressure on long-established golf courses. Many of them are not long enough for modern play and few of them can be lengthened significantly. At a modest 6,326 yards from the back plates and with only two par 4s in excess of 400 yards, Stockport is relatively short by contemporary standards. But the club is responding, where it can, for the need for greater length by adding 15 or 20 yards to those holes on which it is possible to do so. For some years thought has been given to redesigning the 11th hole. By moving the tee into the field to the right of the existing tee, thereby playing the hole towards the clubhouse at roughly 90 degrees to its present orientation, it would then be possible to move the 14th green further back into the field, relieving the congestion which can occur in this area. It may be possible, or even necessary, to construct new holes beyond the present course boundaries.

The club has invested heavily during the last decade in the purchase of land adjacent to the course. This has been done partly to protect the course from future housing development along the boundaries. Now, apart from the single house to the right of the 1st fairway, the land adjoining is owned either by the club or by neighbouring farms. This land is a substantial asset and could, if needs be in the future, be utilised for some compatible activity to assist the club's financial burdens. Such an action is not without its problems, given the club's concern to maintain security of its boundaries from intruders and the desire to protect the landscape. Stockport is fortunate in enjoying such handsome views from its course. However, whatever route is eventually chosen for the long-expected Hazel Grove by-pass – and at the moment it is thought that the road will not actually take away any club land – it may be necessary to minimise the visual impact of the new road by some reshaping of the course. The club's wisdom in acquiring extra land could make this possible. At the same time it is to be hoped that nothing too irreversible is done to Herd and Barrie's still largely intact layout.

To improve the safety of players and the appearance of the course, a programme of tree planting has commenced in the Centenary Year which is designed to change the direction of play on the holes involved and to provide increased protection from wayward balls. Existing copses of conifers are, at the same time, being carefully thinned to improve growing conditions and the appearance of the course by creating a greater mix of trees.

The club enters its second century in good shape with its traditions intact, a strong and supportive membership and a sound management team which makes decisions based on a club ethos which remains that of its founders. By maintaining these standards and the quality of its assets, and by continuing to respect the human worth of its members and staff, Stockport Golf Club is well positioned to prosper in its next hundred years.

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