

DEVON KNOWS WHAT'S BEST FOR THE GREEN!

Seaton Bowling Club in Devon took advantage of this year's enforced closure of its green to completely renovate a playing surface that was highly compacted and suffered disease and pests

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Editor



INHERITING A BOWLS GREEN that was laid in 1928, it was no surprise to volunteer head greenkeeper Peter Barradell that the six rinks at Seaton Bowling Club were suffering when he started to help out with the care of the green four years ago. Helped by fellow volunteer Terry Hurley-Smith, 61-year-old Peter reflects that "years of continuous topdressing of the Sea Hill site in the Devon town had not only created an overly sandy profile on the green's top layer but there were also areas of severe compaction in the lower profile", as soil sampling showed.

Taking early retirement and moving to the south west, Peter – formerly a keen athlete who enjoyed playing international hockey and county tennis – joined the club after being coerced by his wife, a keen bowler. It wasn't long before he was being asked to help out with the green, initially by mowing. With no grounds management experience, he set about supplementing his burgeoning self-taught greenkeeping skills with a number of GMA training courses, complemented by information gleaned by attending various seminars.

He continues: "While we tried to alleviate the compaction with lots of

regular aeration, the green also had a number of other inherent problems, not the least being several mossy areas, too much thatch and, especially during the past two years, localised Dry Patch. Overseeding just wasn't working. And last year we were overrun by leatherjackets. We had overseeded in early Autumn 2019 but by the end of that October, large swathes of the green were turning brown due to the pests. This was compounded by the damage being done by the crows looking for an easy meal. Bird deflectors didn't work but we did have some success with black pepper – after dispensing around 2.5kg of it across the green.

"Something drastic had to be done and when the Covid-19 lockdown was on the horizon, we knew it was now or never."

Clean slate

The club committee had heard about the good work on a neighbouring bowls club's green initiated by Marcus Hewitt, the local representative of amenity supplier Rigby Taylor, so they made contact with him. An initial investigation of the green by Marcus and sports grounds contractor Judges and Son showed, unsurprisingly, very high levels

of compaction at about 100mm down – "interspaced, surprisingly, by a number of 'soft' areas", says Peter – and their recommendation was to "rip up the green and start again".

That was easier said than done, initially, since the usual limited access to the club/green wasn't large enough for the contractor's vehicles and equipment. The local council, "which was very helpful" says Peter, allowed the club to remove part of a hedgerow to permit vehicular access via an adjacent community space. (The green is leased from the council.)

The two-day project saw the top 25mm or so of grass and top rootzone Koroed off, then several passes of rotovation down a further 114mm, followed by vertidrainage down to the drainage at about 200mm deep. The 60 tonnes of top layer removed by the Koro was replaced with an equal amount of new dressing, then a fast-acting fertiliser was applied (Activate XL) plus the EGC granular nematocide, which contains 45% garlic extract, to combat any leatherjackets that may have survived the rotovating. This was followed by overseeding with R9, an ultra-fine dwarf rye with Germin-8T treatment to give the

emerging seedlings immediate access to a package of nutrients, biostimulants and micronised mycorrhizal fungi to aid early establishment, improve root mass development and accelerate leaf extension.

"All the work was carried out in mid-August – Terry and I, plus other volunteers, also took the opportunity to replace the wooden edging boards – and we subsequently enjoyed a fantastic period of weather for grow-in," adds Peter. "In fact, the R9 was germinating within just five days and now, [six weeks later] it is growing so vigorously that we are having to cut it at least twice a week."

He concludes: "The renovation was a big step for the club, because it was not a cheap project. But we knew that if we didn't have a green – a good green – we wouldn't have a club and that would be devastating to our 100 playing members who, in a normal season, would be enjoying bowling in a very sociable atmosphere. So, it had to be done and that was helped by a lot of fundraising. Also, with the pandemic still rife, we decided not to open the green at all this year in the hope that we'll be in the best possible shape for when next season starts in April." ■



Replacing the boards, groundsmen Peter Barradell (far right) and Terry Hurley-Smith (centre) are helped by club members, from left, Peter Newton, John Morley and John Veith



New pavilion

Relaying the green in 2020 was not the first time that Seaton Bowling Club members have rallied round and instigated fund-raising to improve their facilities at the club, which was officially affiliated to the Devon Country Association in 1910 and previously played on a green near Seaton Town FC before moving to Sea Hill 92 years ago.

The original pavilion at Sea Hill was a wooden hut and, during the ensuing years, this was replaced by a building of a more substantial structure but of basic design and, with the aid of a Lottery Grant in 1996 plus repayable bonds purchased by the members and various fundraising events, the club extended the pavilion and incorporated a modern kitchen and bar. Additionally, the dressing rooms were designed in such a way that partitioning can be removed at the end of the outdoor bowling season to allow room for two rinks of short mat bowls, plus a skittle alley, to give members an interest during the winter months.