



## CONTINGENCY PLANS: INVASION BY TRAVELLERS

Neil Robinson suggests how to remove/prevent ‘Travellers’ from camping at the Golf Club.

Secretary At Work: November 2004 *(reviewed January 2012)*

### Prepare To Repel Boarders

The stresses of golf club management are well known and documented. Most Secretary/Managers feel they are well equipped to deal with any eventuality. The unknown will always test the resolve. At 20.20 on Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 2004 as dusk was falling on the fishing port of Fleetwood, 8 miles north of the holiday resort of Blackpool, a set of circumstances unknown or envisaged by the members and staff of Fleetwood Golf Club unfolded. What was required was positive and proactive management and action to deal with a situation that other golf clubs should consider. The end result is to ensure a contingency plan is in situ, should this possible nightmare arrive on their doorstep.

Fleetwood Golf Club is a private members club set in 114 acres situated on Rossall Promenade, 1 mile south of the declining fishing port of Fleetwood. The course is adjacent to the Irish Sea and is a traditional links course. Security to this open seaside area is a constant problem and the club has installed CCTV and entry systems to the clubhouse to deter unauthorised entry. The club is served by two car parks with open entrances. These car parks are adjacent to good class property and there have never been any security issues with regard to vehicular crime. That is until a group of Irish travellers decided that the wide-open spaces of the golf course would make an ideal transit camp.

Travellers had been in the area previously but had never bothered with attempting to gain access to the golf club mainly camping on open spaces and local authority car parks. The local authority had reduced the opportunity to camp on their property by installing height restriction barriers on car parks and public places.

On Tuesday September 7, 2004, a number of travellers set up camp adjacent to Rossall Hospital, this being the site of the original hospital, which is approximately 1 mile from the golf club. They appeared at the golf club on two occasions, one attempting to sell power tools to the roofing contractors, and on another occasion attempting to obtain water from the greens staff.

In view of this the following action was taken:

- a. The greenkeepers’ sheds were kept locked at all times
- b. Trailers were positioned across the roll shutters of the sheds at night
- c. All staff were asked to be vigilant.

At 20.20 on Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 2004, two transit-type vehicles pulling large caravans were seen by the Catering Manager to enter the club car park by the north entrance and proceed down the pathway towards the greenkeepers' compound. He had the good sense to flag down a passing police motorcyclist who called for support and two further police vehicles arrived shortly afterwards.

The caravans on arrival at the sheds promptly turned left across the 9th fairway (this action was probably caused by the activation of the security lighting). They crossed the fairway and also crossed the 10th fairway onto the practice ground. They then travelled the full length of the practice ground before turning towards the clubhouse, where they drove between the 9th green and practice putting green. At this time the members in the vicinity of the clubhouse began offering the travellers certain advice. The travellers then stopped on the grass area to the east of the 9th green and just north of the clubhouse. The children in the party then removed rakes from bunkers, which were taken from them by club members. The travellers after discussion with both the police and members then left the golf club property. The travellers remained in the area for over a week but deterred by the action of the golf club and other premises that followed the same course of action, they then left the area.

## Immediate Action

The secretary/manager, who was some 30 miles from Fleetwood, was informed by mobile phone at 20.25 hours. The Secretary/Manager instructed the bar staff to contact the Head Greenkeeper in order that the Greenkeeper could meet the Secretary/Manager at the clubhouse.

At 21.10 hours, the Secretary/Manager asked all members to remove their vehicles from the club car park and the Head Greenkeeper placed trailers across the entrances to the clubhouse and car parks. The police were asked to pay extra attention to the golf club overnight.

At 07.00 on Saturday, September 11<sup>th</sup> 2004, the Secretary/Manager and Head Greenkeeper met at the golf club and agreed the following course of action:

- a. The course was examined and although there were tyre marks in certain areas, no significant damage had been caused. The police were informed that there was no criminal damage to the golf course and therefore no police action would be required at that stage.
- b. The trailer at the car park north entrance was filled with sand to prevent it being moved and remained in position whilst the situation existed. This trailer was painted with yellow paint for better visibility. Wyre Borough Council provided barriers and sandbags to prevent members driving into the entrance. This action reduced access to the golf club car parks by 50 percent.
- c. The trailer at the clubhouse entrance was positioned to allow cars to enter and exit but in such a position to prevent larger vehicles from doing so. This trailer was painted with yellow paint for better visibility. The trailer was filled with sand to prevent it being moved. This action permitted members to enter and exit the car parks.
- d. A third trailer filled with sand was positioned north of the winter first tee at the south end of the small car park to prevent vehicular access to the golf course.

- e. Trenches were dug at the entrance to the overflow north car park and together with strategically placed boulders to prevent vehicular entrance to the course.
- f. Unfenced areas of the course perimeter were made unfit for vehicles to proceed.

## Conclusion and Action Required

This incident could have been disastrous for the golf club, only a fortunate chain of events ensured that these lawless people left the premises promptly.

These were:

- a. The fact they were seen entering the premises
- b. The fact a police vehicle was passing and was flagged down by a member of staff
- c. The prompt action of the police officer in calling for more assistance
- d. The activation of security lighting and visible security measures
- e. The presence of sufficient members at the relevant time
- f. The reaction of those members towards the intruders.

If one of these heavy vehicles had been driven over a green, the cost of repair could have exceeded £10,000.

Experience has shown that had these people not been removed, their numbers would have increased and the legal process of removal would have been expensive and time consuming. The average length of time for the legal procedure to be implemented can be 21 days.

The financial loss to the golf club due to this incident could have had very serious implications. These would have included:

- a. Damage caused
- b. Legal expenses
- c. Closure of the course for safety reasons
- d. Employment of security staff whilst the course was occupied
- e. Loss of revenue
- f. Clean up costs.

The golf club council approved the following proposals:

- a. Security height restriction barriers be erected forthwith
- b. A written contingency plan for similar incidents was approved

The Secretary/Manager wrote to the following praising their actions:

- a. The police
- b. The catering manager
- c. The members involved

- d. The head greenkeeper
- e. Duty bar staff.

Other golf clubs with open car parks, entrances and areas with vehicular access to the course should ensure that sufficient contingency planning and physical obstructions are available to be put in place should intelligence become available regarding the presence of such persons in the area.

Golf clubs should ensure that they have good contacts with the police and local authority to ensure the exchange of information. All golf clubs should have arrangements in place to ensure that a responsible person (ideally the Secretary/manager) is contactable immediately in the case of emergency. All staff must be aware of this contingency. The membership should be encouraged to assist by asking them to inform the club of any sightings of these types of people in the area, you will have a minimum of 600 pairs of eyes working for you.

Fleetwood Golf Club was very fortunate in that circumstances permitted the swift removal of these people and efficient follow up action ensured they could not return. Other golf clubs who feel vulnerable to this kind of intrusion should consider implementing the above arrangements.

Any golf club Secretary requiring advice on this matter should contact Fleetwood Golf Club, who may be able to assist. Writing a stiff letter to the offenders is not sufficient in these circumstances. Fleetwood Golf Club has written contingency plans for the following eventualities:

- a. Course evacuation
- b. Clubhouse evacuation
- c. Attendance of emergency services
- d. Invasion by travellers.

To contact Fleetwood Golf Club telephone: 01253 773573.

*(Neil Robinson is the former Secretary/Manager of Fleetwood Golf Club).*

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