



Royal Tara Golf Club

Strategic Report

August 2017



Royal Tara Golf Club

Strategic Report

**Prepared by the Board of Management's
Strategic Committee
for the Board of Management**

August 2017

Contents

Introduction	3
SWOT	4
Views of the Members and Other Stakeholders.....	5
The Principal Challenge for Royal Tara	8
Core Areas for Focus	8
Governance	9
Financial Security	10
Membership.....	11
Course	12
Facilities	13
Communications	14
Recommendations	15
Conclusions	17
Annex: Proposed Governance Structure.....	18

Introduction

A strategic review of Royal Tara Golf Club was carried out by a Strategic Committee during 2017 at the request of the Board of Management.

The Committee was led by Theresa Brennan, a member of the Board. The other Committee members were Luke Bowden, Siobhan Kelly, Michael Killeen (also member of the Board), Mark O'Rourke and Anne Randles.

The Committee reviewed a previous draft business plan for the Club (2015-2018) and took account of the Confederation of Golf in Ireland (CGI) Governance and Strategic Guide for Golf Clubs (2016).

Over the course of the seven month review, the Committee:

- Consulted extensively with the Board of Management, the Trustees and past Captains, and with the members and staff of the Club.
- Carried out a stakeholders' survey, subsequent to a series of brainstorming/information gathering sessions with members, staff and other stakeholders on what actions could or should be taken to retain and attract new members and to improve the running and funding of the Club
- Met with Neil Kilgallon, Royal Tara's CGI Support Officer
- Commissioned a club assessment and financial benchmarking review by the CGI, and
- Liaised with members of other clubs who have either recently changed or are in the processing of reviewing their governance structures.

This report was presented to the Board of Management for its consideration in August 2017, accompanied by a proposed 5-Year Strategic Plan (2018-2022). Separate, more detailed analysis reports were also compiled on Governance in Royal Tara, a 5-Year Projected Income and Expenditure assessment (2018-2022) and on the results of the Stakeholders' Survey.

The Committee would like to thank all those who contributed their valued advice, wisdom and time to the Committee in compiling this report.

SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well operated and well managed members' club with good reputation • 27 Hole Championship Complex • High level of volunteerism • Good Club Spirit • Modern Clubhouse & facilities • Proximity to Dublin & to M3 • Hosted a number of national golf events (All Ireland Cups & Shields Events in 2013) • Can accommodate large societies and classics • Active Beginners Golf Scheme/"Get into Golf" • Growing Junior/Juvenile membership • New driving range and practice area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing membership profile • Less participation in members' competitions • Under performance in inter-Club competitions • 10km distance from main urban centre • One of 14 Clubs in Co Meath • Parkland course more difficult to market to overseas visitors • Limited investment capability due to requirement to service Club loan • Bar income is in steady decline • Sub-optimal social activities • Poor Wi-Fi coverage • Potential over-reliance on volunteerism
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income generation from new Driving range • Vibrant Junior/Juvenile membership • Convert beginner golfers into full members from the Beginners Golf Scheme /"Get into Golf" programme • Generate more Green Fees from societies and classics given the 27 hole complex • Meath has the fastest growing population outside of Dublin • Grow footfall through improved restaurant and catering facilities • Proximity to numerous schools and sports clubs • Leveraging of Club House facilities to outside groups • Leveraging of sponsorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golf membership is in decline both in the club and nationally • Membership subscription income failing to keep pace with operating costs • Easy availability of casual golf • Competition from NAMA golf clubs • Reputation risk due to restriction on investment in Club assets, in particular the Course • Actual or perceived inadequate restaurant facilities

Views of the Members and Other Stakeholders

A survey of members, including juveniles, staff and potential members was undertaken in June 2017, as a follow-up to a series of evening brainstorming sessions on measures and initiatives to retain existing members and attract new members.

The response rate at 30% exceeded our expectations and confirms the positive engagement of the members in our Club.

The survey indicated:

- No desire for any significant course modifications
- General satisfaction with the club facilities.
- Support for initiatives to attract new members and greater sponsorship
- A desire for more diverse membership categories and a greater variety of competition formats and
- More enhanced communication

There was less support amongst the respondents for an increase in the annual subscription for members or for increased Green Fees – this was particularly noted by the respondents under 50 years of age. A majority of the respondents were also in favour of the removal of the Entrance fee for new members.

A copy of the full survey report and the ideas generated from the Brainstorming/Information gathering sessions is available on the Members' section of the Club Website.

Listed in the tables below are the proposals and initiatives that received a combined Essential/Very Important ranking from more than 50% of respondents in at least one of the categories.

Course Improvements	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
More standardised quality and depth of sand in bunkers	70%	76%	57%	68%	73%
Improved condition/surface of greens	61%	70%	42%	59%	64%
Additional training/upskilling of course staff	52%	55%	45%	49%	57%
Improved general presentation of course	51%	57%	37%	49%	53%

Attracting new members/Retaining existing members	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
Targeting local sports clubs, businesses and schools	70%	68%	73%	67%	75%
Get into golf scheme	69%	61%	85%	71%	66%
Removal of entrance fee	61%	62%	58%	57%	66%
Targeting lapsed members and their families	61%	62%	63%	61%	63%
Promotional open days/events	60%	60%	61%	54%	70%
More diverse membership categories	59%	56%	52%	51%	69%
Greater variety of competition formats	56%	59%	48%	49%	66%
Reduced annual membership fee	42%	42%	41%	32%	57%
Leveraging club facilities for other activities (eg Gym)	38%	43%	27%	28%	54%

How the Club is Run & Funded	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
Incentivise prompt payment of subs and use of direct debit	63%	61%	65%	66%	57%
Greater leverage of sponsorship	60%	60%	57%	60%	58%
Leverage clubhouse facilities and restaurant for external groups	58%	60%	54%	58%	59%
Develop a meet and greet policy	56%	53%	63%	58%	54%
Address perception of elitism	54%	56%	50%	51%	58%
Review the Club governance structure and Reduce the size of BOM	50%	52%	46%	51%	49%
Enhance procedures and policy for setting green fees	50%	50%	50%	55%	40%
Enhance member/staff relations	49%	51%	46%	41%	63%
Integrate completion purse with club smart card	48%	53%	38%	43%	56%

Facilities & Social	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
Wi-Fi availability	69%	69%	67%	63%	78%
Cover and floodlight driving range	57%	55%	61%	46%	73%
Sky Sports	51%	53%	46%	44%	63%

Communications	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
Communication via email	72%	71%	75%	76%	65%
Enhanced/greater use of website	71%	71%	70%	72%	68%
Communication via social media eg Facebook	57%	57%	58%	48%	70%
Creation of club app	55%	57%	52%	51%	63%
Streaming of information in clubhouse	55%	55%	55%	54%	56%

Suggestions that did not feature as highly as might have been expected	Total	Men	Ladies	Over 50s	Under 50s
Water feature on course	19%	20%	17%	15%	25%
Enhanced Tee boxes	36%	38%	32%	30%	45%
Resurface paths	30%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Redesign/rebuild greens	23%	26%	17%	19%	31%
Additional outdoor facilities eg tennis court, bowling green	25%	24%	26%	20%	32%
Reduced competition entry fee	27%	26%	29%	23%	32%
Increase annual subscription	5%	7%	3%	7%	3%
Members monthly lottery	26%	27%	24%	26%	28%
Alternative use for snooker room	33%	30%	38%	37%	26%
Designate a club house social area for juveniles	36%	36%	35%	31%	44%
Club Newsletter	46%	49%	40%	45%	48%

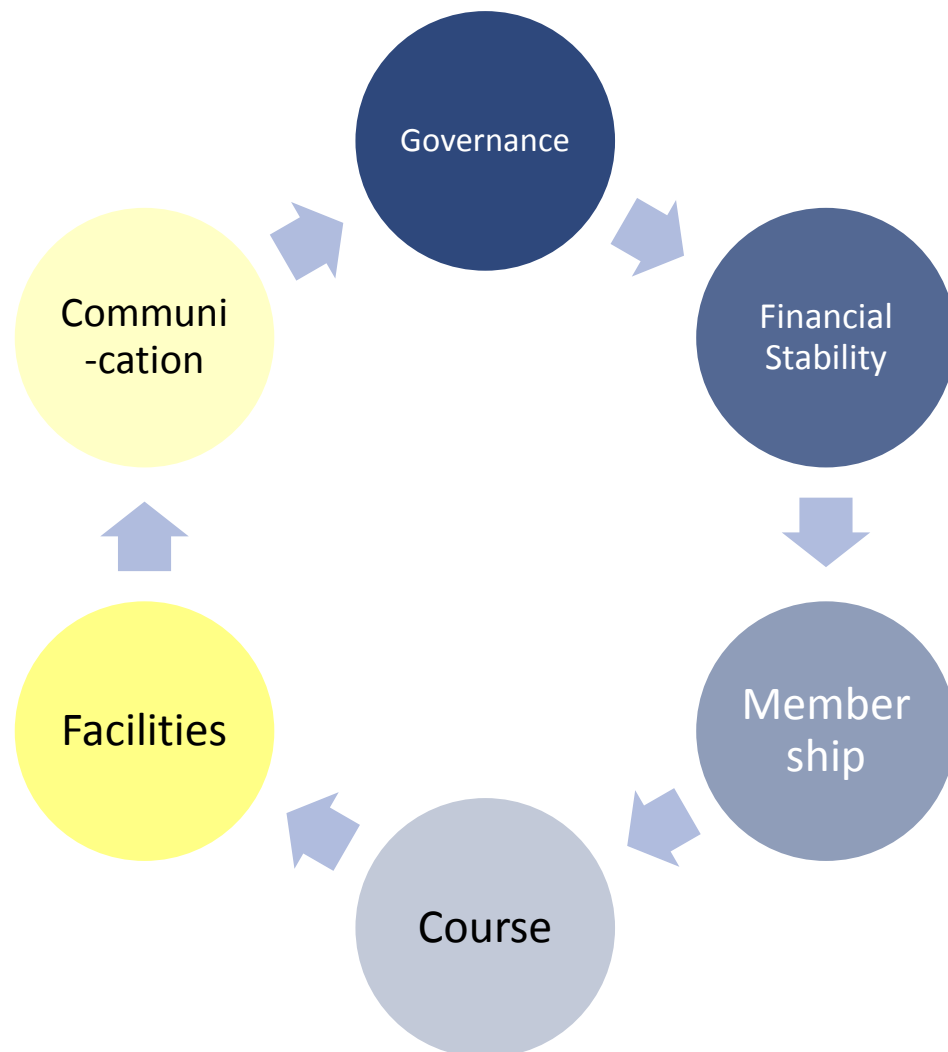
The Principal Challenge for Royal Tara

On the basis of extensive consultation and review, the main finding of the Committee is that due to the declining trend in membership of the Club, and unless immediate action is taken, the Club will not be financially sustainable from 2018.

With this in mind, the Committee recommends that the Board of Management focus its attention on 6 core areas principally to retain and attract members, in order to put the Club back on a sound financial footing and to ensure future sustainability.

The 6 Core Areas are set down below and are addressed in greater detail in this report. The proposed 5-Year Strategic Plan builds on this further, setting out a series of suggested actions over the next few years.

Core Areas for Focus



Governance

The responsibility of the Board of Management of Royal Tara Golf Club is to govern and manage Royal Tara on behalf of its members. Its purpose is to provide leadership and strategic direction and to focus in on the mission, vision, core values and Club objectives.

The challenges for the Board of Management are to:

- Steward the Club through the current funding and membership challenges
- Place the Club on a sounder financial trajectory
- Address a perception of elitism within the Club's governance structure, and
- Ensure the Club's governance structure and practices are appropriate both to meet these challenges and to implement the 5-Year Strategic Plan

While there is strong support for the Board of Management and praise for its work, and for the commitment and effort of its current and past members, there was consensus amongst its members that changes were needed to ensure that the governance of the Club was aligned to modern principles and procedures of club governance. In tandem with this, 73% of the respondents in the Survey said that it was either important, very important or essential that the Club's governance structure be reviewed and that the size of the Board of Management be reduced.

The CGI assessment of Royal Tara identified a need for the Club's governance structures to become more effective, transparent, strategic and sustainable and noted that the size of the Board of Management, at 18 seats, was above average and lacked sufficient diversity. The expected advent of the One Governing Body (OGB) for golf in Ireland by 2018-2019 will also require governance and management structure changes.

The Strategic Committee conducted its own review of the Club's governance structure, in consultation with the members of the Board and taking account of the CGI's 2016 Guide on Governance and Strategy for Golf Clubs. It is recommending that the Board of Management adopt a new structure, as set out in the Annex, in order to be more business-oriented and better equipped to address the challenges and changes ahead.

Recommendation

1. The Governance Structure be amended, as set out in the Annex, to reduce the size of the Board in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness and to be more transparent and business focused.
2. The Club appoint a Chairperson for the Board of Management for a multi-annual term and ensure greater diversity on the board in terms of gender, age, experience and skills set.
3. The Trustees take on an advisory and oversight role for the Board of Management and Joint Club, with a role in the Selection Committee for nomination of Board of Management Officers and convenors.
4. The Board of Management Sub-Committee structure, its skills set and experience be enhanced to support the work of the Board of Management and to encourage greater membership participation in the running of the Club.

Financial Security

Royal Tara Golf Club is a member owned club heavily dependent on income from members for its revenue (86%)

Membership however is in decline and the average number of new members has not been sufficient to compensate for the average number of lapsed and deceased members annually since 2010.

Further contributing to lower membership income is the fact that the club offers age-related membership discounts.

The absence for a number of years of an Entrance fee from new members has also meant that the Club has had little funding available to invest.

If the current rate of lapsed and deceased members remains unchanged and no action is taken, the Club will not be financially viable, from 2018 onwards

The key challenge for the Club is to focus on income generation as any further major cost cutting initiatives will have a detrimental impact on the Club and its facilities.

Income generated from sources other than members is:

- Green Fees
- Rental income and
- Some bar income from non-members.

The largest other income source by far is Green Fee income which, at 10% of total income, was deemed by the CGI in its Club Assessment and Financial Benchmarking Review, to be too low given the quality of the course and the Club's proximity to Dublin.

Recommendation

The Board of Management

1. Address the income shortfall from 2018 onwards
2. Prioritise actions to increase and retain members
3. Identify additional sources of income
4. Look at non-performing assets

Membership

Membership of Royal Tara Golf Club has been in decline for many years and the age profile of its members is growing. The Board of Management needs to prioritise and focus its resources and attention on actions and activities to retain existing members and to attract new members.

The Club faces a number of challenges in this area. It needs to:

- Improve the overall golfing experience for members by for example;
 - ✓ Greater variety of competition formats
 - ✓ Satisfying the needs of golfers of all levels
 - ✓ More options to cater for time poor golfers
 - ✓ More recreational/fun days
- Introduce new membership categories to address members' diverse needs and preferences while not adversely affecting the Club's finances.
- Develop a more vibrant social aspect to the Club.
- Convert the Beginners Golf Scheme/"Get into Golf potential members into full members.
- Retain juvenile members to full members.

Recommendations

1. Act on the ideas and members' preferences identified in the Club survey which relate to improving the overall golfing experience.
2. Develop a more comprehensive social programme to encourage more member engagement.
3. Drive-on the Club's successful Juvenile Golf and Beginners' Golf programmes.
4. Review the membership categories in order to cater for members' different needs and preferences while not adversely affecting the Club's finances.

Course

The main asset of the Club is its Course. The challenge for the Board of Management is to develop and maintain this asset to the highest standard under the current financial constraints. Meeting this challenge will help to retain current and attract new members, thus putting Royal Tara Golf Club back on a sounder financial footing.

The recent Survey of members and stakeholders indicates that members do not expect or favour significant structural or development changes to the golf course but do want improvements and enhancements on what is already present.

The main Course aspects highlighted for improvement were:

- bunkers,
- condition/surface of greens,
- up-skilling of course staff and
- overall presentation of the course.

With regards to the condition/surface of the Greens, the Course Committee and Course Superintendent have already taken certain steps to improve the quality and consistency of same. Staff-up skilling has also commenced and will continue on a more consistent basis going forward.

While there is good work underway, it is imperative that the course is well maintained on a continuous basis and enhanced to meet the needs of members and visitors alike.

Recommendations

1. Prioritise the recommendations arising from the members'/stakeholders' survey
2. Ensure there are adequate staff resources and that appropriate training is provided
3. Ensure the efficient use of limited budgetary resources on course work and machinery and ensure full transparency of all expenditure
4. Ensure there is regular communication with the members on course maintenance and development works and on general issues relating to the course

Facilities

The investment by the Club in its facilities is substantial and the Club has assets which need to be protected and maintained. The Club also needs to maximise the use of its assets, be it the Club House, outbuildings or surrounding grounds.

The challenge for the Board of Management is to maintain the current assets and to optimise their use under the current financial constraints.

Recommendations

1. Continue to do what is necessary to protect the assets of the club and not let them get into a state of disrepair
2. Leverage the Club House facilities and restaurant for external groups
3. Consider alternative uses for any under-utilised assets in the Club House or grounds either to enhance membership experience or to generate further income

Communications

The survey indicated a strong desire for greater communication and use of email and social media to keep members updated on Club activities and news.

The Club also has other stakeholders which need to be taken into consideration in its communications, such as staff, services providers, media and the wider community.

The challenge is to enhance communication, in particular by email and social media in a timely and informative manner.

Recommendations

1. Develop a Club Communications policy which is informative and engaging for members and unlocks the potential that greater communication gives to promoting the Club
2. The policy should enhance the use of the Club's website and promote greater communication via email and social media.
3. In order to be effective, a solution must be found to the issue of poor Wi-Fi availability in the Club House

Recommendations

Governance
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Governance Structure be amended, as set out in the Annex, to reduce the size of the Board in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness and to be more transparent and business focused.2. The Club appoint a Chairperson for the Board of Management for a multi-annual term and ensure greater diversity on the board in terms of gender, age, experience and skills set.3. The Trustees take on an advisory and oversight role for the Board of Management and Joint Club, with a role in the Selection Committee for nomination of Board of Management Officers and convenors.4. The Board of Management Sub-Committee structure, its skills set and experience be enhanced to support the work of the Board of Management and to encourage greater membership participation in the running of the Club.
Finance
<p>The Board of Management</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Address the income shortfall from 2018 onwards2. Prioritise actions to increase and retain members3. Identify additional sources of income4. Look at non-performing assets
Membership
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Act on the ideas and members' preferences identified in the Club survey which relate to improving the overall golfing experience.2. Develop a more comprehensive social programme to encourage more member engagement.3. Drive-on the Club's successful Juvenile Golf and Beginners' Golf programmes.4. Review the membership categories in order to cater for members' different needs and preferences while not adversely affecting the Club's finances.
Course
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prioritise the recommendations arising from the members'/stakeholders' survey.2. Ensure there are adequate staff resources and that appropriate training is provided.3. Ensure the efficient use of limited budgetary resources on course work and machinery and ensure full transparency of all expenditure.4. Ensure there is regular communication with the members on course maintenance and development works and on general issues relating to the course.

Facilities

1. Continue to do what is necessary to protect the assets of the club and not let them get into a state of disrepair.
2. Leverage the Club House facilities and restaurant for external groups.
3. Consider alternative uses for any under-utilised assets in the Club House or grounds either to enhance membership experience or to generate further income.

Communications

1. Develop a Club Communications policy which is informative and engaging for members and unlocks the potential that greater communication gives to promoting the Club.
2. The policy should enhance the use of the Club's website and promote greater communication via email and social media.
3. In order to be effective, a solution must be found to the issue of poor Wi-Fi availability in the Club House.

Conclusions

Royal Tara Golf Club has always been a dynamic club, capable of embracing change. It has had three different titles and two different locations since its foundation in 1906 and has addressed many challenges over the years.

Success has been achieved through the dedication of volunteers, working together and with foresight to plan for the future - a tradition we carry on today as we plan for the next chapter in the history of Royal Tara Golf Club, one we hope that fulfils our Vision

“To be a financially sustainable premier golf club in County Meath, instilling pride in its members and providing a friendly, enjoyable golfing experience”.

The Strategic Committee has put together this Strategic Report and accompanying Plan, following a series of brainstorming sessions and consultations with members and other stakeholders. The Committee’s recommendations incorporate the views of stakeholders in each and every section. We believe all future plans must take into account members’ needs and members must be consulted in advance of their preparation.

The main objective of the Strategic Plan is to secure the Club for the benefit of its members, prospective members and its staff. The focus is on retaining existing members and attracting new members, providing a greater golfing experience for all. This in turn will secure the future of Royal Tara Golf Club by putting the Club on a more sustainable long-term financial footing.

The Plan identifies Six Core Areas that require focus, together with a series of recommendations and actions to achieve our objectives, including a new Governance Structure which will require members’ approval at a General Meeting.

The challenge cannot be under-estimated. The members of Royal Tara, however, have never been known to shy away from challenge or change. This is why we have the magnificent Club and facilities that we have today and a course we are proud of.

Above all we have a club of great spirit and heart with members who are extremely generous with their time and expertise. We are confident that with everyone working together, we will achieve the objectives of this Plan and secure the future of Royal Tara Golf Club.



Annex: Proposed Governance Structure

