



PGA
MONTHLY®

meets...

David Shepherd

With a family heritage in the golf industry, David Shepherd has worked for several prestigious golf venues on the continent but has now returned to the UK to take up the role of CEO at The Wisley

David Shepherd's grandfather was a scratch golfer at Hindley Hall, in Wigan. His father was a club professional, serving at Hindley Hall and then Hickleton, in Derbyshire.

Accordingly, he was immersed in golf and the golf industry from a very young age.

"During my early and mid-teens, I spent countless hours at the club," he said. "When I wasn't playing or practising, I was cleaning my father's practice balls ahead of lessons, bagging golf tees for the shop or helping with club repairs.

"Immersed in the environment, I gained a head start in the industry and, quite naturally, never considered doing anything else."

Here, the PGA Fellow Manager discusses his latest prestigious role in charge of one of the most exclusive clubs in the British Isles.

How have you worked your way up to becoming CEO at The Wisley?

My journey has taken me on a tour of Europe, working at several amazing clubs and resorts. I have been privileged to work at four properties, each with very different requirements. This has exposed me to a wide range of industry segments and brilliant people. I believe that spending significant time at each property, learning every role within diverse cultures, climates and business models, has provided me with a versatile skill set that can be applied in various environments. I was fortunate to visit The Wisley on a few occasions and knew a few members through both Monte Rei and The Scandinavian, so I was aware of how well the club was governed and its ambition to continually improve. When I received a call about the opportunity and spoke to the Chair, I knew it was something I wanted to be part of.

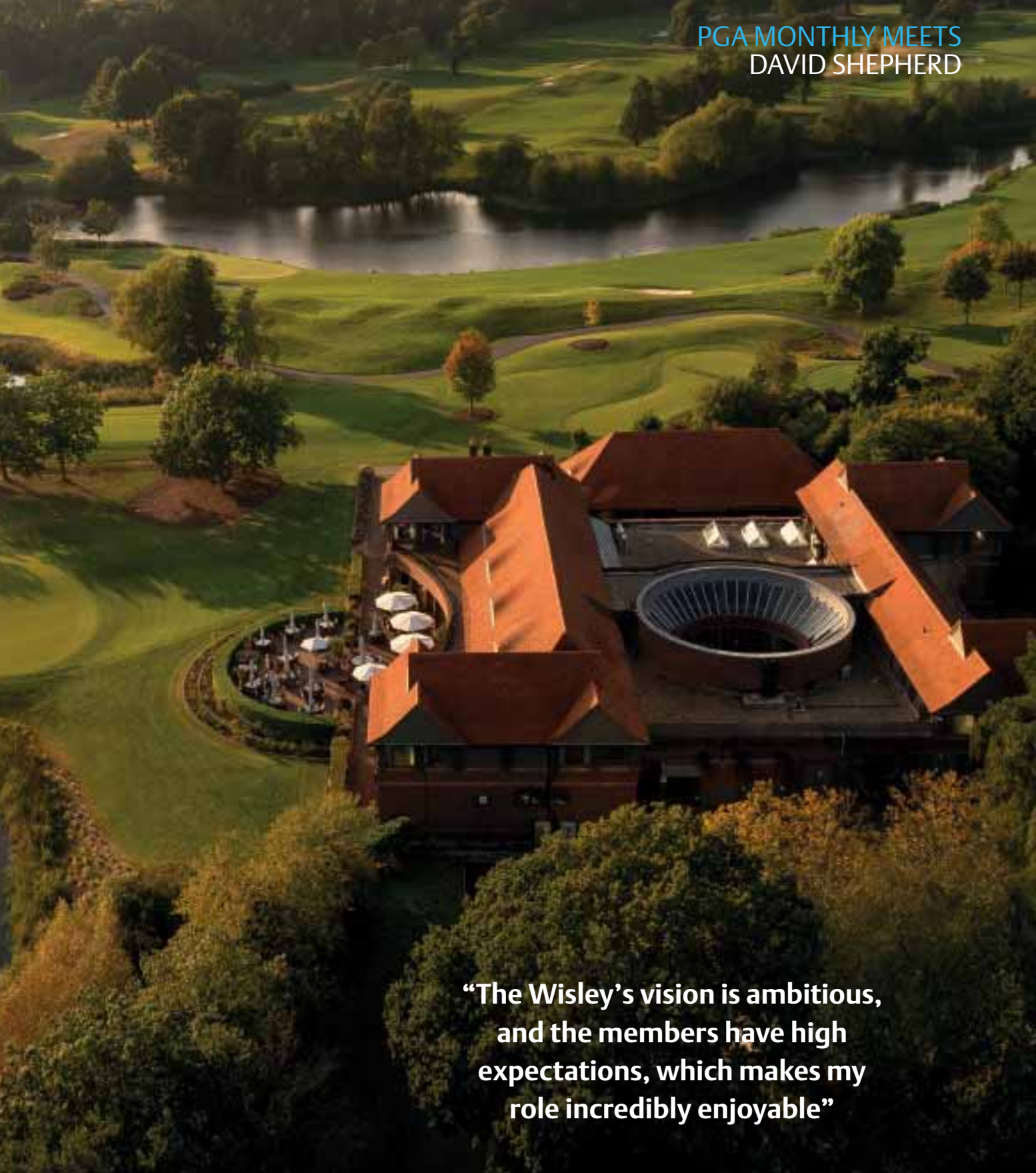
What does your role entail?

Together with a board of directors, a vision for the club is set, and my role is to create the strategy to deliver that vision. Within the golf industry, The Wisley has a really progressive governance model where the executive team is empowered to run the club, and together with our management team, we do just that. I

am extremely fortunate to lead a highly skilled, experienced and well-resourced operations team, which means my involvement in the day-to-day business is not often required. Most of my time is spent supporting the team or focussing on the future.

A key part of my role is ensuring that our heads of department have all the resources they need to perform their roles effectively. Helping them avoid typical club politics is essential to enable them to do their jobs without unnecessary interference.



An aerial photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, a large clubhouse with a red-tiled roof and a circular glass-enclosed structure is visible. The clubhouse is surrounded by lush green grass and trees. In the background, a large pond reflects the surrounding landscape, with more golf course terrain and trees visible beyond it.

**“The Wisley’s vision is ambitious,
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My role involves navigating short-term challenges while ensuring the club continues to move toward its vision and improves continuously. The Wisley’s vision is ambitious, and the members have high expectations, which makes my role incredibly enjoyable.

With more than a dozen professionals on-site, you are one of the biggest employers of PGA Professionals in the area. What roles do they play?

I strongly believe that PGA Professionals are uniquely positioned to play significant roles in running successful

clubs. Together with Ian Cox, our Director of Golf, we understand that our members have better golf experiences when surrounded by exceptional PGA Pros.

In addition to myself and Ian, we have four dedicated coaches and 12 other



PGA Professionals fulfilling critical roles, including Golf Operations Manager, Membership Manager and Competitions Manager. We aim to provide our trainees with an excellent learning experience that equips them for successful careers in the industry. Our structure allows them to grow at The Wisley and explore various aspects of club business. As a large team of skilled and ambitious individuals, we see team members move on to exciting new adventures. This is not something we fear but rather something we take pride in. Our structure ensures that when someone moves on, we have others ready and trained to step into their roles.

Do you encourage your trainees to pursue PGA Excel or other career development opportunities?

We want our trainees to succeed both personally and professionally. Whether their ambitions lie in playing, coaching, managing or specialising in another area, we aim to support them. We have introduced a system that

rewards trainees for excelling in their education, and we actively help them achieve their goals. We strive to create a culture where everyone aspires to be their best. As a result, many team members voluntarily take part in CPD programmes and PGA Excel.

Do the professionals at The Wisley have their own specialisms?

Yes, we have PGA Pros ranging from first-year trainees to Master Professionals and tour-level coaches, each bringing unique expertise. This diversity allows us to learn from one another, which is a tremendous advantage. Our team includes specialists in management, retail, custom fitting and coaching. This variety makes us all better, even through informal conversations during lunch breaks. When I completed my PGA training at The Belfry, I was surrounded by highly skilled PGA Pros who imparted invaluable knowledge before advancing in their careers. This is the culture we're fostering at The Wisley – one that promotes continuous learning, prepares

DAVID'S THREE KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CLUB

- 1** A clear, shared goal to create a "luxury member experience" with everyone understanding their significant role in this mission
- 2** A strong emphasis on listening to the team and providing them with a positive, fair workplace where they feel valued and have opportunities to grow and learn
- 3** The support of our members, who greatly appreciate the team's efforts. In return, our team works hard to move closer to our vision

younger team members for future opportunities and builds a network of industry professionals.

What advice would you share to help other leaders motivate their staff to succeed?

We build our team with a single goal: achieving our mission to deliver a "luxury member experience". We don't view our PGA Professionals through a profit-and-loss lens or measure them solely on financial returns. Instead, we assess how they enhance the lives of our members. By taking this approach, we gain far more value than can be measured financially.