

Southport Old Links 2026 – Woodland Report Update

Thank you for inviting me back to Southport Old Links, it was really good to see the vast progress the course has made since I did the woodland plan in 2019.

The course is unrecognisable from what it was then and given that the club has only 3 greenkeepers, the improvements are remarkable. The more open landscape has not only benefited the landscape creating a more links like appearance but has also greatly benefited the agronomy by increasing light and air to the playing surfaces and promoting the fine grasses. This also allows the clubs golf course architect the necessary space to add a more strategic design which makes more pleasurable golf for all categories of golfer.

I am sure that the membership appreciates the hard work and improvements that have been made. Well done to the club and the greens team for having the courage to progress in such a positive way, anything that involves trees is always controversial mainly due to the misinformation that the public receive especially regarding carbon capture.

Carbon Capture

It is often a criticism that you are adversely effecting carbon capture when you remove trees in fact permanent grassland is equally efficient at capturing carbon.

Carbon capture - suitably managed grassland can hold as much carbon as a woodland - and for longer. The total values for carbon pools within grassland and deciduous woodland are roughly similar at 300 tonnes per hectare. Most of this is below ground in the soil for grassland and, depending on the levels of ground disturbance, locked away for a very long while. A third of this (about 100 tonnes per hectare) in woodland is in the trees themselves. The trees will release their carbon as limbs fall off or the trees die, but perhaps the most significant is the seasonal release in the autumn when leaf drop occurs.

By removing trees and promoting the fescue grasses you are actually increasing the sustainability of carbon capture!

General points to consider, firstly the areas of dense secondary woodland. I would recommend that the club employs a contractor for thinning these areas as there is too much work for the small green staff that the club has. The thinning process will not only benefit the sustainability and conservation value of the woodland but will also benefit the agronomy of the course.

Secondly, and more importantly with only 3 staff, leaf and debris collection becomes a major time constraint on their hours which could be better spent on more productive agronomic tasks.

Regarding more specific comments I have bullet pointed them below.

- Planting LHS of first hole to protect the boundary I would suggest Scots pine, a mix of small cell grown trees and a few pot grown plants 2/3m high.
- A general point regarding the linear copses of birch between holes thin them into copses to break the symmetric appearance and allow the fescue grasses to establish between the copses this will reduce maintenance as mowing speeds will be increased and will add biodiversity to the site. It will also improve the agronomy by increasing light and air to the playing surfaces.
- Be very wary of being pressured into replanting a more open landscape suits the character of the course and benefits the agronomy, it is called Southport Old Links! Further, the club has plenty of tree management to do without creating more work for the clubs limited workforce.
- The work done to date has followed the woodland management plan, although much progress has been made the club should not rest on its laurels and should continue to implement the plan.
- To the right and rear of the first green are three birch and a willow which cast shade on the playing surface, they should be removed to protect the agronomy of the playing surface.
- To the left of the 2nd tee the cypress serve no purpose and are competing with the playing surface for water and nutrient they should be removed to safeguard the agronomy.
- The view to the fairway from the 13th tee is restricted by the trees to the left the end of the stand closest to the tee should be removed to the increase visibility and drama of the hole.
- An infinity view should be created by removing the stand of trees behind the 3rd and 4th greens and adjoining the tiger tee on hole 5, this would give an attractive view to the broader landscape and hills in the distance. This would add to the links feel of the course and would improve the agronomy of a number of areas. the fescue grasses could then be encouraged to give definition without having any detrimental effects.
- On hole 6/15 the cypress to the right of the hole screen the view to the green and give the impression that you are playing to the 3rd green. If they were removed, then this confusion would lost and space would be created to allow the clubs architect to create a more challenging strategic design.
- In the area between the 6th green and 7th tees the fescue grass should be promoted to widen the walk off from the green, a more attractive path could then be achieved.

- The gorse to the right of the green looks unattractive and limits the walk off from the green, it should be removed and the area converted to fine grass. Note how the gorse has enriched the area creating an ecosystem that favours the broadleaf grasses and weeds such as brambles.
- Behind the 8th green the pines have been removed to improve the agronomic environment of the playing surface, two birch have been retained which are also adversely affecting the agronomy, they should be removed.
- Hole 9 the birch to the right screen the view to the fairway and hide players on the 4th tee. It is always questionable whether it is safer to see players rather than hide them, personally I think it is safer a view which I understand is shared by the club's health and safety adviser.
- The willow to the left of the 9th green adversely affects the playing surface and is overmature it should be removed to safeguard the agronomy and increase safety.



The agronomy of the area to the rear of the 2nd green has been improved immensely by the green staff who have removed the problematic trees and created a far better playing surface.

2019 the rear of the 2nd green had poor grass coverage and surface roots which damaged expensive machinery and stressed the turf.



The appearance of hole 3 has been greatly improved by removing the encroachment and the ugly shelter.

If the trees to the rear of the 3/4th greens were removed then a view down the holes and to the countryside would add to the landscape interest.