

Course Report – December 2023

Current Conditions

Another mixed bag of weather conditions as we have gone from a cold and icy start to December, a wet period in between some milder weather that we are having at the time of writing. As we have been busy with our winter project work and also trying to juggle the poor weather, we have been able to cut greens once per week to keep on top of excessive growth. There has been a bit of disease pressure with fusarium and dollar spot being visible on some of the green. We have sprayed a foliar application of Ammonium Sulphate, Iron, Phosphite, Seaweed and Silicon to try and hit the disease pressure and grow it out with the milder temperatures. The lines of Fescue still coming through from September's pot-seeding which is great to see and shows that it was such a worthwhile process. The seedlings should be well established now, and we just need to keep promoting their growth and development going forward.

I am getting feedback from a lot of members about pitch marks and a lot of people not repairing them. It is important to remind everyone that they have a responsibility to repair pitch marks, especially at a time when the greens are softer due to the wetter weather.

Winter Enhancement Projects

Work is continuing on the Winter Enhancement Projects that were started in November. These areas are combined over 5000m² in size, so it has taken a lot of turf to cover the area but also installing irrigation at the same time has prolonged the projects. It has been a great experience for all the guys to learn something new and develop their skills. Irrigation has all been installed in-house with a few minor repairs also undertaken. We have given 3 of the team experience using our mini-digger and many of the team have not been involved in projects like this before so we will go into next year's projects with a far greater understanding of what needs to be done and how to do it.



Figure 1: Richard Thorburn digging the irrigation trench on the 10th path.

There was a great article written by Garrett Morrison of The Fried Egg which talks about the restoration of the greenside bunker on Redan. I was really pleased to see Scott Russell and Ryan Yuill get a mention for building the revetted wall alongside Rory Paul and Reece Haspell. They produced some outstanding work, and it is only right that they are credited to it.



Figure 2: Scott in the renovated bunker on Redan showing the scale of the job.

Coastal Erosion Work

Work was undertaken to do some restorative work on the coastline. Stuart Reed came in and repaired the banking along the coastline to an angle of 45° to help protect the coastline from further damage. He also reestablished some of the rock protection for around the steps on the second and straightened out the Eel Burn. We will look to bring Stuart back in once or twice a year to maintain this angle on the banking and to make any necessary repairs.



Figure 3: Stuart Reed building up the bank at the 3rd tee.

Staff Update

Richard Connell left us in December to start a new role with turf machinery company, Baroness as their Territory Manager for Scotland. Richard started with us as a mechanic in January 2022 and has helped to create and develop the workshop area as well as managing and maintaining the fleet. He also managed to achieve a SVQ Level 2 in Sportsturf Maintenance and has helped to train members of the team on how to grind our cutting unit set-up. We would like to thank Richard for his hard work and support over the last 2 years and we wish him all the best in his new role.



Figure 4: Richard moving onto pastures new.

Hot Topic – Time To Reflect

At the end of my first full year as Course Manager, I wanted to look back at what we have achieved over the last 12 months. This year has flown by but also when I think back to the first half of the year, it feels like years have gone by and not just a matter of months.

We have achieved a lot in the space of a year which I did not fully appreciate until I started writing down this list:

- *Welfare Facilities within the Greenkeepers Shed*
 - All walls, doors and skirting boards painted.
 - A drying room was installed with new lockers to help dry clothing.
 - All welfare areas are heated with high-end electric heaters.
 - Water heater installed in the loft to supply hot water in Canteen and Toilet
 - New shower and shower room fitted.
 - New LED lighting
 - New emergency lighting
 - New front door
 - New security system
 - New fire alarm system
- *Main Shed*
 - New LED Lighting
 - Painted wall
 - Fleet of Toro machinery all arrived with Capex items in addition.
 - Exterior and roller doors painted.
 - New fire door
 - New emergency lighting
- *Bulk Materials Building*
 - Old building demolished with brand new building finished in October.
 - Capacity of bulk storage and internal storage increased considerably.
 - New compound built to the east of the existing building.

- *Golf Course*
 - Greens and approaches managed as one.
 - Fairways increased in size from 13 hectares to 16 hectares by fairway widening.
 - 3 successful overseeding applications on greens and approaches.
 - Tees and fairways overseeded.
 - All semi-rough areas verti-drained.
 - Monthly Wetting Agent applications in all areas improving irrigation efficiency and recovery after dry periods.
- *Turf Nursery*
 - Renovation of degraded turf nursery on time and under budget
 - New irrigation installed in-house.
 - 4000 tonnes of material screened with 1000 tonnes surplus.
 - Successful overseed in August with seed germinating within a matter of weeks
- *Winter Projects*
 - 6th, 10th and 16th tees renovated.
 - 6th and 10th paths stripped and returfed.
 - Irrigation installed in-house.
 - Over 5000m² of turf laid
 - 17th long bunker, 2 x greenside bunkers on 12 and left greenside bunker on 15 all rebuilt.
 - Environmental management plan works (via Bob Taylor's recommendations), including tree and buckthorn management and blackthorn regeneration work
- *Staff Development*
 - 3 team members passed Pesticide Application 1 – Theory
 - 1 team member passed Pesticide Application 2 – Boom Sprayers
 - 1 team member completed SVQ Level 2 Sportsturf Maintenance with another due for completion in 2024.
 - 4 team members completed the Bernhards Grinding course.
 - Volunteering at the Scottish Open and Open Championship

With all of these projects ongoing throughout the year, we have lived in an element of organised 'chaos' at the sheds as we have to work around contractors, working in and around the building but now we are in a much better position with a much-improved welfare facility, a new shed for storage and a compound area which we didn't have before.

There are a lot of things I would have loved to have achieved this year, but staff availability and other planned projects kept our focus, which sometimes limited us from achieving everything we wanted to. Next year, with a new structure to the squad, we hope to be able to do a lot more of these tasks including more intense divotting, conduct a lot more on-course maintenance works such as topdressing and aeration, especially in stressed areas, refinement works, maintain a tidier site and getting on top of the peripheral jobs.

Other key projects and planning for 2024 will include Coastal Erosion Measures, Greenkeepers Facility Extension, Irrigation Upgrade Planning (including Borehole exploration), Winter Course Work Planning and Environmental Management Planning and Reporting.

As I have said before, if our foundations are not built properly, our main objectives will ultimately fail. This year we have made some really solid foundations in some key areas which will in turn provide success down the line.

Finally, a big thank you to all clubs, committees and members for their support and investment this year and for taking the time to come to the panel evening, attend course walks, read our reports or stop by to ask questions. It is important that we take you all on our journey and it helps for you to understand some of the issues or problems we face. It is important to remember we are still on a journey with the West Links, but we are in a far better place now thanks to the work that has already been done.



Figure 4: The team hard at work on Redan before the Winter Enhancement work – lucky to call this place “home”.

Kyle Cruickshank
Course Manager