



Course Report – January 2024

Let me start by wishing all members and their families a Happy New Year and all the absolute best for 2024 – on and off the golf course!

Current Conditions

We are incredibly lucky in this little pocket of East Lothian that we do not seem to get hit as hard by the weather as other parts of Scotland, although it did feel at moments throughout December, it would not stop raining. Again, we are fortunate that the course is able to drain water well and there weren't too many areas of standing water other than the rising water table that has brought water to the surface at Yellowcraigs (adjacent to the 9th fairway) and a few of the bunkers on the 8th hole and short game green at the range.

Before Christmas (which feels like a long time ago now), we sprayed the greens with Nitrogen, Iron and Seaweed which helps to harden the plant and suppress disease pressure. Due to the wetter weather before Christmas, we had a few patches of fusarium and dollar spot which were starting to develop, but this fertiliser application along with the cold snap in January has helped to halt the pressure.

We got straight back into some maintenance during the first week of the new year with a sarel roll on the greens followed by a roll and a wetting agent application to help pull through some moisture away from the surface and through the rootzone.

Borehole Drilling

As some may have seen, we have had a large drilling rig onsite for 2 weeks investigating to see whether we have a viable/suitable irrigation source to help futureproof our course. At the moment, we budget tens of thousands of pounds per year for mains (potable) water to be used on the golf course.



Figure 1: Drilling on the area outside of the greenkeeper's sheds.

We engaged with Hydracrat, a drilling company based in Lanarkshire to initially produce a report to identify the best areas to test drill, along with an extra independent survey conducted by British Geological Survey (BGS).

We initially identified 3 areas:

- Greenkeepers Shed – area between the shed and 4th/15th tee. Produced water of good quality
- Wee Course – beside the putting green. No sign of water.
- 16th hole – left of the 2 bunkers in the rough. Produced water albeit with a slightly high salt content*.

**It should be noted that although it did have a “slightly high” salt content, it was far below the threshold for sea water which means depending on test results, it might still be usable for irrigation.*

Whilst the rig was on site, we felt it would be prudent to try another location west of the Greenkeepers shed to see if we would strike any significant. We did manage to hit water which is of the same quality and quantity as the greenkeepers shed which was an added bonus.

It is important at this stage not to get carried away as we still have a long way to go before we know if the water is of a suitable quality, and whether there is enough water to sustain our irrigation supply. I would suggest at this point certainly installing a production well on at least one, but preferably 2 of the sites, with a mindset that it might not eradicate our mains water usage, but supplementing our water supply with these boreholes will help to reduce costs and will help the club to be less reliant on potable water in the future.

Winter Projects

Frustratingly the cold snap in the middle of January has hindered progress on a number of projects but has allowed us to get other winter jobs underway.

We have a small amount of turfing and marram planting left to complete on the 6th, 10th, 16th tees and the irrigation pipework still needs to be connected to the existing system. Applied Irrigation will come in to install the decoders and do final testing.



Figure 2: Marram planting on the 10th tee.

The first fairway bunker on the right of the 5th fairway has some minor tweaks left to carry out before finishing the revetted wall and turfing the surrounds. The bunkers on the right at 4 will be started on the 22nd of January

with the hole to be closed whilst we have greenkeepers working there. We aim to have these 3 bunkers completed in 2 working weeks. The hole will reopen on days we are not working on them and for weekend play. This measure is taken to protect our staff from oncoming shots to which they are blind.



Figure 3: Rebuilding the front right bunker on the 5th fairway.

We have also made a start on cutting down the fringing rough on selected holes with the Super 500. I have explained a bit more about this in the Hot Topic Section.



Figure 4: Super 500 rough cutting in progress.

Advert Filming

Something a bit different for us to contend with on the 15th and 16th of January as a film crew were on site to film an advert in partnership with an American golf company. Although the advert will look like it was filmed in the middle of summer and not in January, they really managed to get lucky with the weather and made our “Star of the Show” – the West Links, look incredible on screen.

One of our greenkeepers, Scott Russell, who has a background in media productions was with them whilst they were out on the course and was even filmed changing the hole on the 12th green – no make-up required!

A big thank you to all members for their understanding and patience whilst the film crew were on site and luckily, they did not disrupt things too much. The entire crew were so complimentary about the course, facilities and warmth they were greeted with whilst they were here which was a real compliment to us all.



Figure 5: Filming a bunker shot out of the new bunker on Redan.



Figure 6: Film crew on the 18th tee.

Hot Topic – Eco Rough Management

As mentioned, this week we have started cutting down some of the Eco-Rough around the site with the Super 500. This is the third season we have undertaken this work on the site as we struggled with resources in the winter of 2022/23.

This work has been advised by Bob Taylor, our environmental consultant, who has identified areas of “fringing rough” that requires annual management. Bob describes fringing rough as:

“...a band of transitional rough situated between the semi rough and the offline unmanaged dune grasslands. It is managed to promote a finer and more open sward that can be allowed to flower and seed, which in turn will stop a rolling or bouncing ball before it enters the offline grassland.

It will offer a due penalty to the slightly errant shot without resulting in a lost or unplayable shot. Such a band of infrequently managed rough can be invaluable to general play as it will ease some of the potential frustration arising from lost balls and issues around retrieval.

Of interest ecologically, the fringing rough will reduce the amount of trampling within the offline rough so helping to conserve flowering plants and nesting birds. To achieve a more open sward, the continued collection of arisings will be essential, and this must be undertaken following any management intervention.”



Figure 7: The hatched area showing where the transitional fringing rough has been cut.

Using the Wiedenmann Super 500 cut and collect machine, the fringing rough is cut down to a height of <5 inches using flail blades. The machine creates a vacuum that pulls the cut grass into a big collection hopper. By collecting the grass clippings, it starves the remaining grass plants and soil of nutrients which in a number of years, will help to reduce the thickness of the fringing rough which will promote finer grasses. This will also make it easier to find errant golf balls. Once all the recommended areas are cut, the blades on the Super 500 are changed to scarifying blades which again will thin out the fringing rough and help to expose bare soil which creates a seedbed for wildflowers and finer grasses. The cut areas will then be raked with a tractor-mounted rake before being cut again with the flail blades which will clean any cuttings, debris or straggly bits of grass. This will leave a clean area which will then start regrowing again once the temperatures start to increase.



Figure 8: A close up of the flail blades (LHS) and what the rough looks like after being cut (RHS).



Figure 9: The Super 500 machine (LHS) and the area right of the 12th tees after being cut (RHS).

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