

Course Report – October 2023

Current Conditions

At the time of writing this on the 21st of October as Storm Babet is battering Scotland, the Indian Summer in September feels like a long time ago. Up to this point in October we have already seen some wild weather which included 112mm of rain (70mm in the first storm of October, 36mm during Storm Babet, days of very strong winds up to 45mph and now overnight temperatures as low as 2°C. As I have mentioned the Growing Degree Days and Growth Potential in most of my other reports, we can see on the chart below that both of these models are starting to slow down.

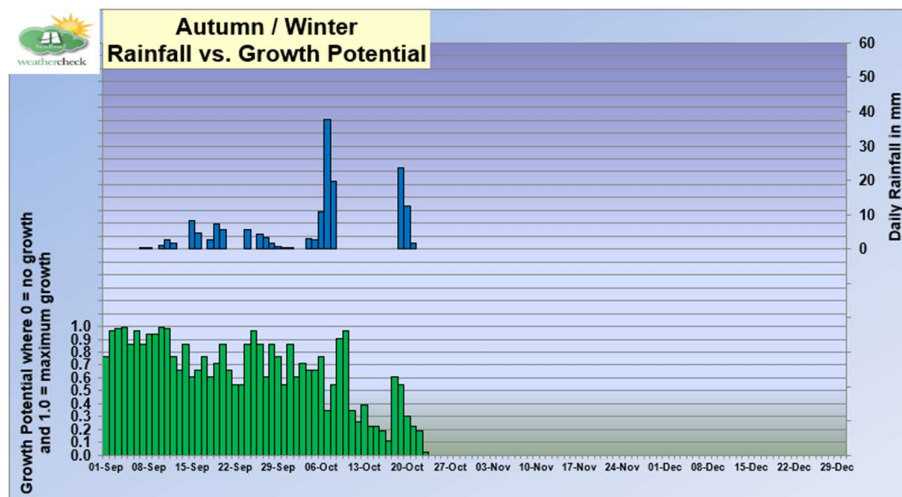


Figure 1: Graph showing the decline in Growth Potential from the beginning of September.

As we carried out our Autumn maintenance earlier this year, we have a much better recovery period compared to last year and the results have been phenomenal. I have never experienced a better strike of seed in nearly 20 years of greenkeeping which is a testament to the work carried out by the team. To see close to every hole on the greens and approaches bursting with newly germinated sprigs of fescue is no mean feat and shows we are heading in the right direction with the management and maintenance of the greens. As it has been repeated to me many times, the easy part is getting the seed to germinate, the hard part is establishing and maintaining these new seedlings into the sward. With this in mind, our heights of cut have been raised to 5mm, our cutting is reduced and although we will be applying some topdressing over the coming weeks, we must be very liberal with how much we put on and how we drag it into the sward as the abrasiveness of the sand and the stress of excessive drag-matting could be detrimental and will not protect our investment into the greens.



Figure 2: Fescue popping on the 15th Green.

I am aware of some negative comments regarding the greens, but I must reiterate the point that is a short-term pain for a long-term gain. As I spoke about in the Discussion Panel evening we held in March, if we do not build the correct foundations, ultimately our objectives will fail. Without the ability to store materials for most of the year, we haven't been able to put out the amount of topdressing we normally would which would have helped with the smoothness and trueness of the green's surfaces. We have now started stockpiling sand and will look to regularly topdress through the winter when conditions allow.

Staff Update

After seeing 2 of our Team leave in September, I have some positive news as Ryan Yuill joins us from Muirfield where he served his apprenticeship and Steven Spence joins us following several years away from greenkeeping but previously served as a Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Gullane GC. They will be starting in mid-November, and we look forward to welcoming them to the team.

We also saw Alex Hodges leave in September as he starts a new adventure down under at Royal Melbourne Golf Club after a year with us. Although we were disappointed to see Alex go, we are delighted that he has decided to further his career at another world-class venue and wish him all the best of luck for the future.

Lewis Connell started the week following Alex's departure having decided upon a career change from working in Property to Greenkeeping. Lewis has been thrown in at the deep end and has shown already he will great team member going forward.

We are also in the final stages of recruiting a new Deputy Course Manager following Gavin's departure in June and we hope to be able to follow up with an announcement on this in the next few weeks.

Tom Stidder – Turfcare Equipment Consultant Services

We welcomed Tom Stidder on the 4th of October to do some fine-tuning with our cutting fleet. Tom has 26 years of hands-on experience working with all the main turf equipment companies and offers independent advice on how best to set the machines up. He spent one day with all the team

showing them how to adjust different aspects of the cutting units, adjusting mowing and cutting speeds as well as recommending appropriate blades and reels for each machine. We hope that this will help us to improve the refinement of the course by getting a closer cut on the coarser grasses which will help to promote the finer grasses. We have had a few issues with some of the new fleet, especially the fairway mowers where we weren't getting the results we were looking for, but with Tom's help, we should see a big difference going into next season.

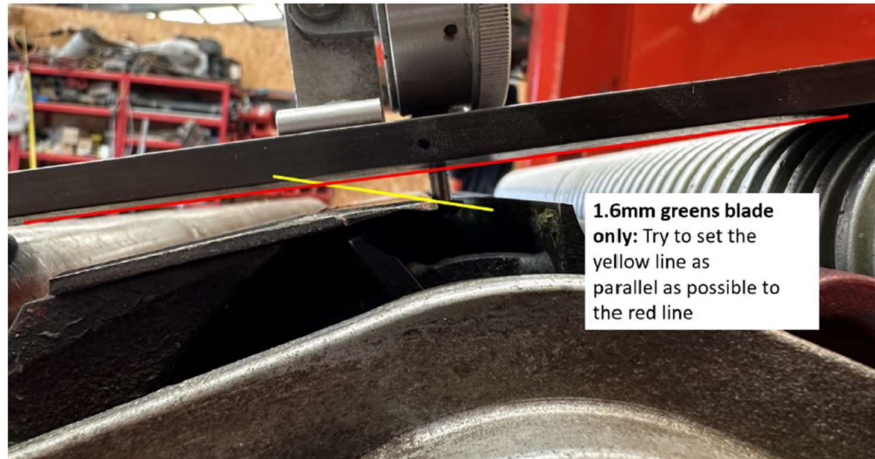


Figure 3: An example of the fine-tuning Tom made to our Greens mower.

Winter Projects

We were initially due to start our tees rebuilding projects in January, but we have been able to secure Chris Haspell and Clyde Johnson's time earlier than initially planned, allowing them to start on Monday 6th of November. The projects we will be working on are detailed in the Winter Course Enhancement Plan but obviously, the dates have changed. By carrying out these projects earlier in the winter, we should be able to establish the tees in time for the start of the season and avoid the uncertainty of the weather in January. We plan to start on the 10th tee on the 6th of November.

Winter Course Set-Up

From the 6th of November, we will go to a Winter Course set-up. From this date, tee markers will be moved onto areas which do not get used during the main playing season to give the tees a break before the start of the new season. The tees that are being renovated will be used as normal until they start having work done on them. Once the work starts, Huxley Premier Tee Turf Mats will be put out for golfers to play from.

During this period of reduced course maintenance:

- Cutting regime will be reduced.
- The white markers will be taken in and Red/Blue tees will be moved to less utilised areas.
- Holes will be changed once per week.
- Pin Sheet will be out of action with holes moved to areas not utilised in the main playing season.
- Fairway mats will be brought into action on the 11th of December.

By doing some of these measures, it will allow the team to get stuck into our winter projects. We have a lot we want to achieve this winter, so it is vital we allow ourselves time to get these projects done efficiently.



Hot Topic – Rough Management

During the winter months, we will start to cut down a lot of the thick rough areas around the course with our “cut and collect” mower, the Widenmann Super 500. Due to a staff shortage and trying to get our other winter work done last year, we didn’t manage to get this machine out to these areas but with the dry summer that we had, some of these areas were not as bad as what they could have been after we cut them in 2021. Our environmental consultant, Bob Taylor, helped to identify areas that require attention and other areas that in his opinion do not need any maintenance – the right-hand side of the 5th fairway being a prime example where the rough is nice and wispy with fine fescues and sweet-vernal grasses in a healthy population.

Areas like the back of the 6th green, both sides of the 8th green, right-hand side of the 8th fairway however do need to be cut down and by collecting the clippings and not recycling the clippings back into the soil which helps to replenish and nourish the grass and soil. After it has been cut, we will then use a tractor-mounted spring rake to break up/stand any low-lying grasses before using the scarifying blades on the Super 500 to cut the area, breaking up the surface and providing a seedbed for grasses and wildflowers to get into. These areas over time will start to thin out and be more desirable to play out of. Doing this work will encourage wildflowers as well as the finer grasses to flourish as they are not competing with the coarser, rank grasses such as ryegrass, Yorkshire fog or cocksfoot.

