



Course Report – November 2023

Current Conditions

It's fair to say that November has provided a mixed bag of weather. There have been glorious days of sunshine albeit with lower temperatures, perfect for getting lots of work carried out on the West Links (and perfect for golf). There has also been a lot of rain with a few storms thrown in for good measure.

With this cooler and wetter period of weather, we are seeing outbreaks of disease on the greens. They are due for an application of foliar fertiliser as well as holes 10 to 18 need to be sprayed with Acelepryn to combat leatherjacket activity. We will also apply a preventative fungicide to keep disease pressure at bay as best as we can especially with our young fescue seedlings still flourishing.

We have had a few mechanical issues with our sprayer that have stopped us from doing as much spraying as we would like but hopefully, these issues will stop long enough to get these aforementioned applications out and also get a covering of wetting agent across the whole site.

We managed to get a light topdressing application out on the greens and approaches on the of November which we have been unable to do whilst the Bulk Material Shed was still under construction. We will continue to topdress through the winter months where possible to make up for a lack of applications throughout the summer.

Coastal Erosion

Storm Babet started a horrible chain of events which saw a concerning amount of our coastline reclaimed by the sea. Although our existing Coastal Erosion Protection Zones held up very well during the periods of high tides, it was other more vulnerable areas that felt the biggest impact including the right side of the 3rd tee and the back of the 14th green.

Stuart Bayne and I met with our consultants from Envirocentre to discuss what our next steps are, and they have provided guidance on short, medium and long-term solutions and monitoring. There will be a 14-ton excavator on-site ASAP that will push back rocks and sand on the coastline along the 3rd hole, back of 14th green and left of the 12th hole, creating a 45° gradient to absorb wave energy and to deter the waves from undercutting the existing erosion zones and increasing vulnerable areas.



Figure 1: Coastal damage at 3rd tee and dune on 11.

We will work with Envirocentre on proposals for the most vulnerable areas of the coastline which will include increased monitoring and more inspections throughout the year to make sure we are doing all we can to protect the West Links.

Winter Enhancement Projects

On the 6th of November, our Winter Enhancement Projects kicked off on the 10th and 6th tees. We also started on our bunker rebuilding programme by rebuilding the 2 bunkers left of the 12th green which have been in poor condition for quite some time.

The 10th tee has been lowered by 300mm with a lot of poor soil material taken out and replaced with the remaining rootzone from the Turf Nursery project. This tee has been built on really poor heavy soil and a mixture of bricks, cement drains and big rocks making up the subsoil of the tee. The weekend of rain following the reconstruction of the tee proved that we needed an element of drainage in the tee, so we had a quick rush to find drainage pipe and gravel. Three days of rain then delayed us from getting the tee turfed. The tee was then quickly sand-capped to allow us to lay turf on the Thursday morning where the guys managed to roll out 30+ rolls of big turf to cover most of the tee.



Figure 2: Poor subsoil on the 10th tee with a pile of bricks pulled out by the trencher.



Figure 3: Big rolls being laid on 10th tees.

The rain delayed us on the 6th tee as well but luckily not to the extent of the 10th tee. The White tee is now three times as long as it was before and double the width, sharing a tee with the Black tee. The Blue, Red and Yellow tees now have a much larger tee to play from as well and the tee has been shaped to follow contours around the green. The mound at the back of the 5th green has also been removed creating a much better view into the Quarry on 6 which will now accentuate this great and underappreciated feature. Again, the team got to work on Friday laying over 40 big rolls of turf but there is still a long way to go.



Figure 4: Back of the 5th green looking down into the Quarry



Figure 5: Graeme trenching the Irrigation line on 6th tees.

Thursday 16th of November saw work start on the bunker left of the 15th green and the rebuilding of the 16th Red and White tee. Chris Haspell and Clyde Johnston got to work very quickly and had the basic shaping done within a couple of hours. The bunker is being restored to look more like it did in old photographs of the hole. Although the bunker will be considerably bigger, like the 17th bunker we completed in March, it will be far more playable and fairer to play out of. It was important to renovate this bunker sensitively due to the historic nature of the hole and it is important that we trusted Chris and Clyde's professional skills to bring this bunker back to its former size and shape.



Figure 6: Renovated bunker on Redan.

Environmental Work

I am aware of some of the concerns that members have regarding some of the environmental work we have done in the past few weeks. I should have communicated this better before we started so this did not come as such a big shock.

In 2022, we enlisted the services of Bob Taylor, who is the industry-leading Environmental and Ecological expert for golf courses and advises the R&A with their Open Rota course such as St Andrews and Muirfield along with other top UK clubs. Bob provided a report recommending ways to improve our environmental footprint and encourage more native flora and fauna. On some of the areas of concern, he recommended that we:

- Remove 7 trees that are not native to coastal dunescapes and are detrimental to these areas.
- Retain Hawthorn around the course for bird nesting and a food source for deer.
- Removal of Sea Buckthorn at the 4th to expose the Rocky Outcrop which has been lost over time.
- Cut down the middle and back parts of the Blackthorn left of the 5th fairway whilst retaining the front area as part of a regenerative programme. Once the middle and back sections have regrown to approx. 1.2m, the front part will be cut down to ensure cover/habitat is always available.

Along with the cutting and collecting of the fringe roughs through the winter which help to promote wildflowers and finer grasses, there are a number of other recommendations Bob has made that will look to implement over the next few years. It is important to note that we are looking to enhance our environmental management of the site, but unfortunately, some of these areas need to be intensely managed before we have the desired outcome. We are lucky that we consult with a number of industry-leading experts who advise us on best practices and management of the West Links.

Staff Training

There has been a good number of opportunities this month for staff training and development. We sent 4 of the team to Mortonhall GC for the BIGGA East Section's Learning and Development Roadshow where they learned about different fertilisers, seeds, growth regulators and machinery from different companies within our industry. The team were more than happy to share what they had learned with the rest of the team and found it to be a very interesting day of learning.

We have 3 of the team set to undertake their Pesticide Application 1 training on the 27th of November followed by a test in the following weeks. This is like their theory test to then go on and undertake further Pesticide Application training such as Knapsack Spraying (PA6) and Tractor Mounted Boom Spraying (PA2) in due course.

Bernhards which supplies Grinding machines for sharpening cutting units are hosting a Sharpening course at Gleneagles on the 28th of November. We have sent members of the team on this training course before which they highly recommend so we will continue to send the team on these courses whenever they run.

I was lucky to be invited to two events this month:

The Links Clubs at Fairhaven GC and St Annes Old Links, Lytham – The Links Club is an education and networking event held every year at a links course around the UK. I have been invited to two previous events at Carnoustie (April 2022) and Royal Porthcawl (November 2022). It is a great

opportunity to meet with Links Course Managers from around the UK and Ireland to learn and discuss issues they are facing – coastal erosion being high on the agenda for some!

Barenbrug Launch Day, Carnoustie – Leading seed producer Barenbrug was launching a new range of Slender Red Fescue called BARNoustie which has taken nearly 20 years of development and will be included in seed mixtures in the near future. There was also a course walk by Links Superintendent, Kevin Stott who has led the transition of their greens from predominantly Poa Annua to Fescue, a journey that we are on as well.

Hot Topic – Fertilisers

Fertilisers provide nutrition to the grass plant and soil in many different ways with each area of the golf course requiring different inputs. The make-up of these fertilisers varies greatly with different analyses of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium which are known as macronutrients with additional elements known as micronutrients added in smaller amounts such as Iron, Magnesium, Manganese or Calcium. Fertilisers are complex with a lot of different technologies and application methods for applying feed to the turf.

Below is an example of 3 of the most common types of fertilisers with a really good analogy for the different methods of fertilising by comparing them to different types of sweets and how they break down.

- Foliar Fertilising – Applying a small amount of fertiliser by spraying the grass and allowing the plant to absorb inputs through the leaves. This is similar to pouring a sachet of sugar onto your tongue and it absorbs in your mouth. We apply these to areas of the course when they require a quick uptake of nutrition such as applying iron when there is disease pressure or when applying fertilisers with growth regulators.



Figure 8: Spraying the 1st green.

- Granular Fertiliser (Quick Release) – Applying small granules of fertiliser to the area which is then broken down by water (rainfall or irrigation) which then provides the soil with nutrients ready to be taken up by the roots. This is like putting a malteaser in your mouth and

stripping the chocolate off of the malt biscuit. These fertilisers can have a longevity of 4-8 weeks and can release different types of Nitrogen over this period to maintain steady growth and nutrition over this period of time.



Figure 9: Fertilising the 1st green with a fertiliser spreader.

- Granular Fertilisers (Slow Release) – A granular fertiliser again, but releases nutrients over a period of months rather than weeks. This is like a mint humbug which takes a while to break down and constantly releases a small dose of nutrients to keep the grass plant ticking over for a longer period of time.

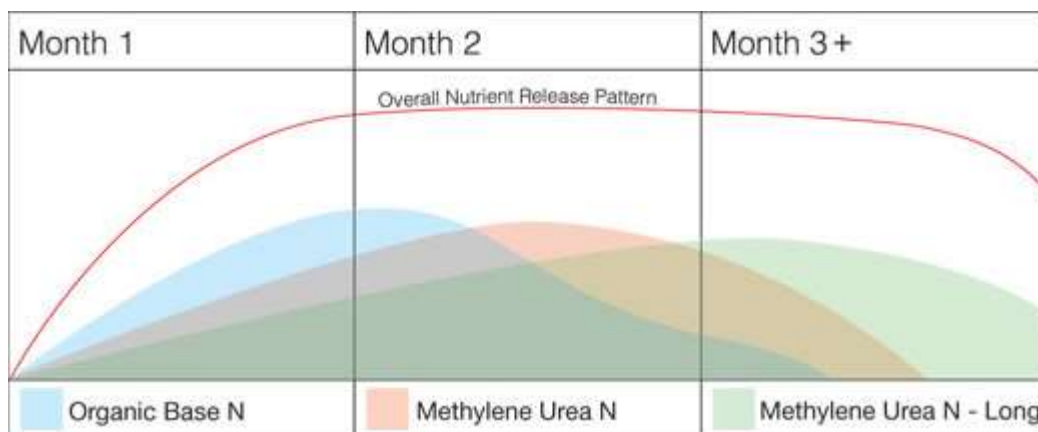


Figure 10: Example of how the different forms of Nitrogen release during a 3-month period.