



Course Report – April 2024

I would firstly like to thank members for their kind words and feedback from the AGM held on the 27th of April. It really meant a lot to hear positive comments during the meeting and from speaking with members before and afterwards. I would like to reiterate my comments that full credit should go to my team who have been working very hard in some truly awful conditions since October and have really gone above and beyond to get as much work as they have completed over the winter.

Current Conditions

Mother Nature really hasn't given us any breaks so far in 2024 with the prolonged wet period continuing. This has been a very wet start to the month with nearly 98.2.mm to date (29th of April) which has already superseded last year's monthly total for April. We have had 2 days which have produced an inch of rain each. This volume of rain has flooded the top of the 9th fairway with water spilling over from Yellowcraigs coupled with the rising water table. There is not much we can really do at this moment with the flooded area and the water in the bunkers due to the fact the water table is so high, any effort to pump water out right now would not remove the water and would be a waste of time and labour. Of course, we will replenish the bunkers with sand and cut these areas once we are able to.



Figure 1: Temporary water feature on 9.

The wet conditions are part of the reason why we decided to deep tine all the greens to help filtrate water through the rootzone and avoid puddling on the surface. We started on Monday 8th and finished all the main course greens on Wednesday 10th. We tined to a depth of approx. 8 inches followed by a dimple roll to help close the holes up and to aid recovery. The below photo shows exactly the reason for doing this work with the left side of the image and area that had been tined on the edge of the green and the right side of the image

showing an area that hadn't been tined which had started to puddle and hold water. I appreciate the disruption to golfers, but sometimes we must be proactive to conditions like this.



Figure 2: The deep tining work on the left and an untouched area starting to puddle on the right.

The temperatures have also been a bit sporadic with some good warm temperatures for growth (high – 18°C) and then some dark and cold days (low – 3°C). Recovery after the maintenance week work has been good and recovery after the tining work is going well as well. We found a break in the weather on the 4th of April when we applied a fertiliser package of Ammonium Sulphate, Iron, Phosphite, Seaweed and a silicon-based product. It is worth noting that the different grasses that are present in our greens start to grow at different times of the year and currently the ryegrasses and broader bents are starting to wake up with the fescue still sitting there quite happily with minimal growth. *Poa Annua* will start to produce seed heads in the next week or two, which we will have to manage with a growth regulator.

We top-dressed greens and approaches on the 15th of April which was worked into the surface well. We have spent time over the last couple of years trying to calibrate the top dresser to put out a nice even spread and we now have these settings dialed in which makes a big difference to the end result. Throughout the summer our plan is to topdress 9 holes on a weekly basis (every Monday, weather permitting) which means all the greens will receive 2 applications of topdressing per month. This should make a big difference to ball roll and consistency. The reconstruction of the Bulk Materials building last year eliminated our ability to top-dress, but now we have a good stock ready to go at any moment.

As the warmer temperatures start to come, the weeds on most surfaces will start to pop out as well. We usually spray these in May using a “post-emergence” herbicide. This means that the weeds must germinate and start to establish for the herbicide to work as it will enter through the weed's leaves and kill the weed from the inside. It may seem like we are getting overgrown with weeds such as daisies and plantain in areas, but this is the most effective way to control the weeds on the course.



Figure 3: Topdressing on the 1st green before being dragged in.

Coastal Erosion

Again, Mother Nature seems to be relentless with the consistent high tides that don't seem to be easing up. We have lost more of the banking at the 3rd tee and the 14th green. The Rock Armour at the 2nd and the Sandbags at 11 are holding up well. The section that we built up with sand at the 11th has been eroded by the tides, but the sand bags have not been compromised. A local contractor carried out remedial works along the coastline by pulling back sand and rocks to fill in the eroded areas to an angle of 45° which will help to stop any undercutting and further erosion.



Figure 4: Remedial coastal erosion work at the 3rd tees

On Thursday 18th of April, Neil Gordon from Envirocentre presented plans to the North Berwick GC members detailing the areas of concern and what the route forward may look like. It was a very well attended meeting and we thank all those who turned up. It's clear that this is an area of concern for many members and I'm not overexaggerating by saying that is a huge threat to the future of the golf course. We have been working with relevant stakeholders (Envirocentre, Nature Scot, East Lothian Council) since November and trying to formulate a plan to protect the golf course going forward.

Winter Projects Update

We are delighted to bring all the new bunkers on the main course and on the Children's Course back into play. The team have done an outstanding job of rebuilding and landscaping these bunkers which hopefully gives members a snapshot of how all the bunkers will look going forward. The frustrating part for us is that this will take time to get around the entire course, but we have made a good start this year.

The new tees at 6, 10 and 16 came back into play on Friday 26th of April. We thank all members for their patience whilst this work was undergoing, and the new turf was establishing. We will closely manage these tees to help protect them in their infancy so please adhere to any roped-off areas of hoops when on these tees.

Other areas of GUR that have been turfed are now open such as the new path at the 13th green and the back of the 5th green. The team have continued to turf-worn areas such as the 12th bridge, path ends of 1, 5, 11, 14 and other areas that show bad signs of wear. Again, please adhere to any roped-off areas and hoops in these areas.

Environmental Works

The area to the left of the 4th hole where the Sea Buckthorn has been removed has had all the spoil and chippings removed with rough shaping carried out. This is a 2-phase project that will be completed in winter works of 2024/25 with the remaining organic soil and brash/roots removed to expose the sand before sowing a fescue/coastal wildflower mix to establish in this area.

Hopefully the work that has been done to expose the rocky outcrop there has given the members a glimpse of what this area will look like once fully naturalized. With guidance from our Environmental consultant, Bob Taylor, we will look to create habitats such as bird boxes or possibly a hibernacula for amphibians to improve the biodiversity in this area along with sowing native grasses and wildflower seed mixes for pollinators.

We engaged with Mike Foy who is the Tree Officer for East Lothian Council regarding a tree that borders the 9th hole and Yellowcraigs. The limbs were starting to encroach onto the golf course, and we wondered what our options were and who had responsibility for the tree. Mike's assessment was that "The stem of the tree splits into four from just above ground level, probably result of coppicing years ago. Unfortunately, the stems have not formed strong unions between each other. There is evidence of included bark which means that if left there is a possibility that the stems will split apart. Given the proximity of the 9th fairway I would suggest that the tree is removed". Given this recommendation, we have agreed with Mike and East Lothian Council to remove this tree and to replant at least 6 trees in Yellowcraigs to make up for the loss of this tree.



Figure 5: A new sign at the left of the 4th explaining the work that is being done in this area.

Staff Training

We were absolutely delighted to see 5 of the team pass their Pesticide Application training course for boom sprayers. Over the winter we went from having only 4 members of the team qualified to use spray pesticides but now we are up to 10. There was some really good feedback from the assessor regarding the skills and knowledge demonstrated by the team, which again serves themselves and the West Links in good stead for the future.

Rainfall Chart

Rainfall records to the 29th of April 2024.

	2021	2022	2023	2024
January	80.0	20	26.2	48.1
February	51.0	66	33	47.2
March	24.0	19	78.4	73.6
April	3.0	41	34	98.2
May	69.0	48	24.39	
June	38.0	24	43.6	
July	39.5	36	48	
August	44.5	21	37.4	
September	39.5	67	50.4	
October	155.0	56	152.6	
November	23.0	94	89.54	
December	109.0	23	108.4	
Total	675.5	515	725.93	267.1

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