



Course Report – May 2024

Current Conditions

At the time of writing, we have seen a big difference from my last report with only 17mm of rainfall to date (20th of May) and a jump in temperatures showing an increase in growth. Although we are wearing less layers and reaching for the sun tan lotion, the average temperatures have been just on the cusp of where we would like them to be. Temperatures in England have already been hitting mid-20's which shows we are still a few weeks behind them in terms of optimal summer growth.

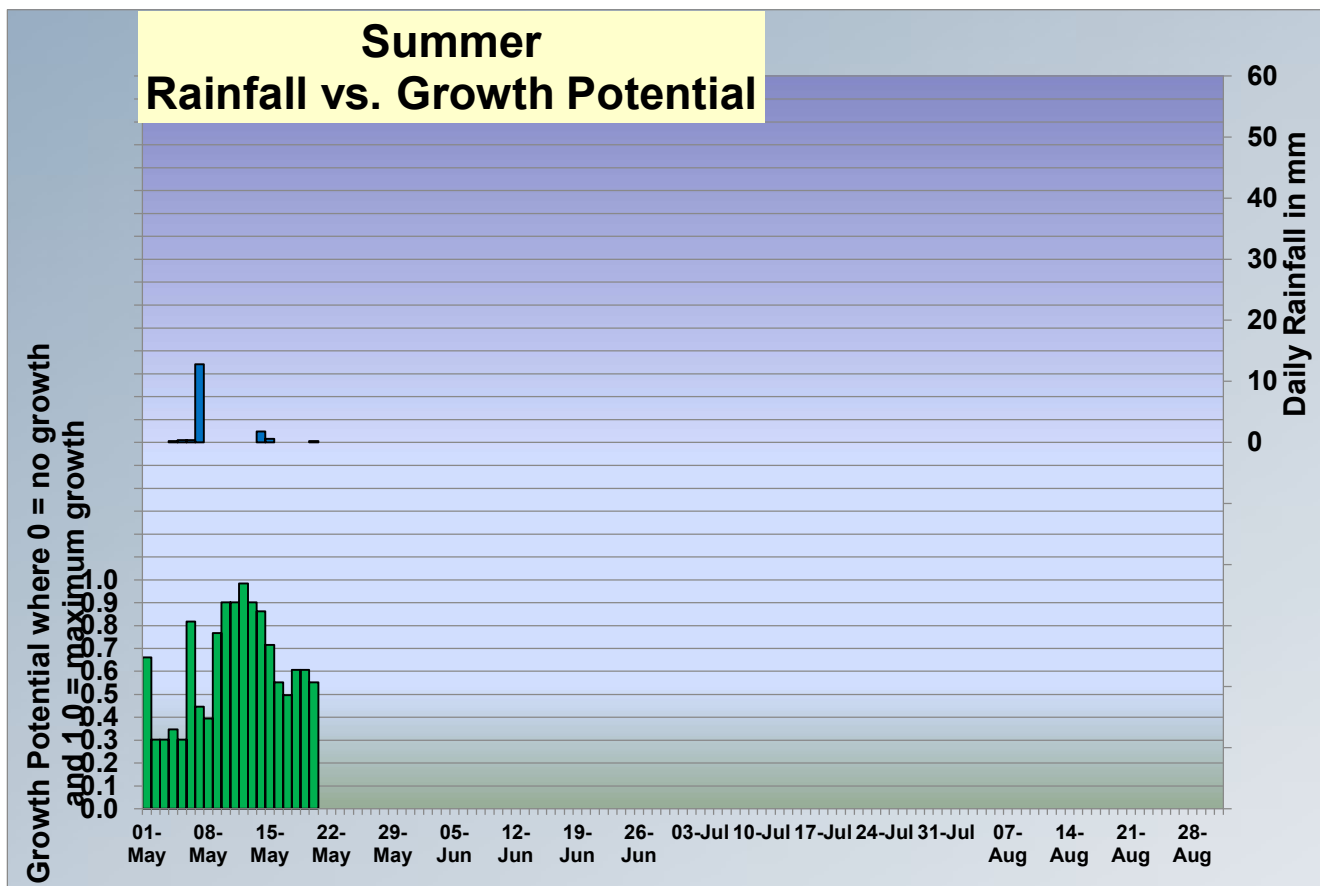


Figure 1: Growth Potential chart where >0.6 is considered “good growth”.

We are seeing some damage from leatherjackets on a number of greens but more prominently on the 1st, 17th, 18th, and Putting Green. Small holes (as pictured below) show where birds have been pecking and pulling the leather jackets out of the ground. The leather jackets come to the surface to nibble on the shoots and roots of the grass plant before going back into the rootzone. Although we sprayed insecticide in November, the leather jackets were still able to populate. There is not a great deal we can do just now, however, we have fertilised the greens using a 7.0.14 fertiliser to thicken the sward and promote recovery in any damaged areas.



Figure 2: Damage from Leatherjackets and birds pecking.

We have started our post-emergence selective herbicide applications around the site with an estimated 40 hectares of the site to treat not including greens. This will take a few weeks to complete but we have already sprayed 12 hectares of fairways and all the fairways and semi-rough on the Children's Course.

Those who have been playing on or walking around the Children's Course will hopefully have noticed the greens all being made bigger and some reshaping of some fairways. Now we are a Team of 13 we can have a greater focus on the important Children's Course. We had heard from a lot of members that the greens had grown smaller over the years and some of them were getting harder to play to or to keep a ball on due to their small size. We have now increased the size of all the greens which will hopefully make a difference going forward. We also wanted to have better definitions of the fairways and semi-rough. This will help to better define and present each hole and make it feel like you are playing on a proper golf hole and not an area of land that has just been cut down to fairway height. This really is a great historic asset for the club to have and we hope to give it a bit more TLC and to continue to improve the conditioning in line with the main course.

Greens Overview

The last few months have been quite stressful to say the least trying to get the conditions on the greens where we would like them to be. I would first like to thank all the members for their patience and hopefully, I can explain some of the challenges we have been facing and some of the issues that we have to deal with.

Members are aware of a "5-year plan" that had been in place before my appointment and are now asking the question – we are in year 4 of a 5-year plan – where is the progress? Although this plan was agreed upon before my appointment, we have made great strides working towards the milestones laid out, achieving 29 out of 39 with another 5 in progress. The organic matter content on the greens has fallen from an average of 12.4% in 2019 to an average of 7.1% in July 2023 with samples for 2024 being sent away at the end of June. Although our target range is <5%, we are now at the point where fescue seed will establish and thrive in the greens. All of our performance metrics that are measured by an independent laboratory are trending in the right direction, but unfortunately, the most important metric, playability, is the one that suffers.

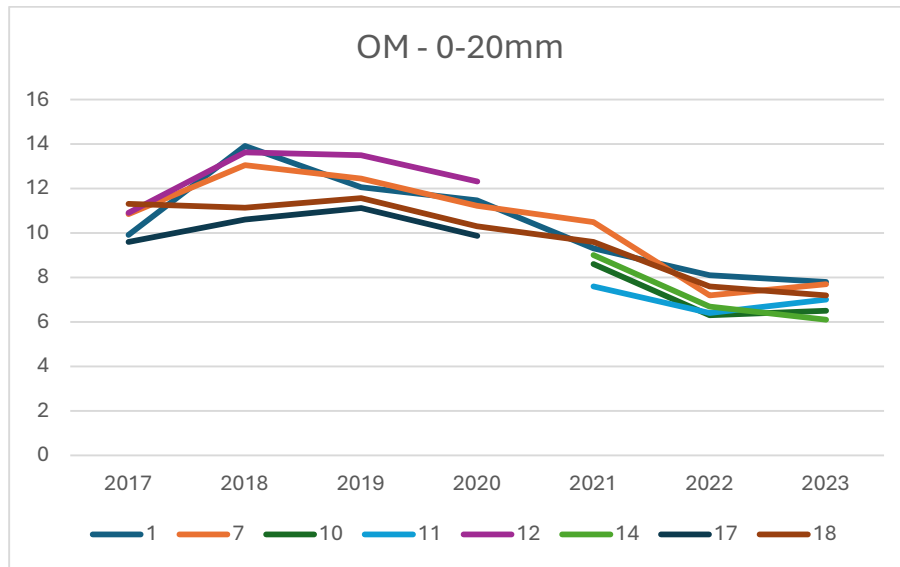


Figure 3: Chart showing the decrease in Organic Matter content since 2018.

We have been as keen as everyone else to see quick progress on the greens but unfortunately, these types of processes do take time. We also have to appreciate that in Year 1 of the plan, we hosted the Women’s Open Qualifier, which limited the remedial work we could undertake. We then had a period of transition as Darren left his post and I was appointed. In the past, we had a high turnover of staff which made regular maintenance of the course a challenge without trying to undertake renovation works. We had the best part of a year where we did not have the ability to store sand in our yard as the Bulk Material Building was damaged and then rebuilt. This meant we could not carry out any topdressing to the greens to help with smoothness and trueness. Now this building is complete, and we have a healthy stockpile of sand, we are catching up on a year’s worth of missed applications.

We undertook an invasive hollow core in September 2022 which we have reaped the rewards from with the huge success of the overseeding in September 2023 helping to establish fescue seedlings over the winter.



Figure 4: Fescue seedlings germinating on the 15th green.

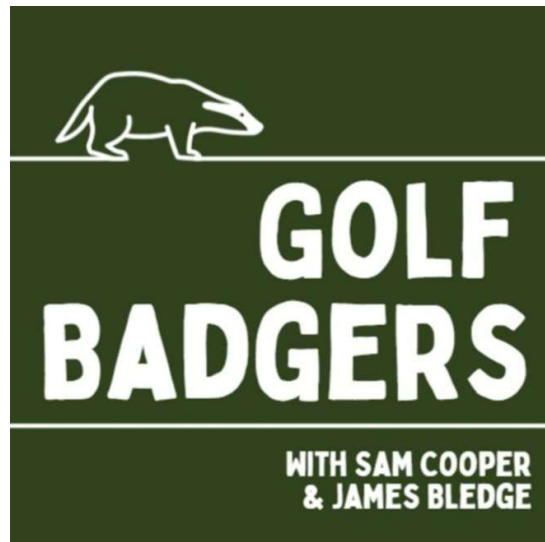
The comparisons with other golf courses locally are unhelpful as the reality is, that we are anywhere between 5 and 20 years behind some of these courses that have already done the work we are still undertaking and are now reaping the benefits. If we had not started this type of work in 2021, I have no doubt we would have been at a critical stage now and would have been even further behind our neighbours. Although the local golf courses are mere miles apart, the topography and soil are very different with different characteristics that will not get to summer playability at the same time of the year.

I have been speaking with consultants, sales reps, and friends within the industry about some of our issues and have been assured we are doing all the right things, but we just need many factors to come together to get us to where we want to be. Until we have a sward that is Fescue dominant, which is our main objective, we will always have a slow start to the year as the different grasses within the sward all start growing at different times and at different rates. Continuous aeration, overseeding, topdressing and refinement are required to get where we want to be. Luckily for us, we are now in phase 2 of 3 which means less aggressive practices and more promotion of seed establishment and dominance (see podcast recommendation “On the Horizon” to find out more about these phases).

I understand and share some of your frustrations when the greens recover slower than anticipated and I will do all I can to make the greens at North Berwick the envy of our neighbours, but we are very much playing catch up to them at the moment and change will not happen overnight. I can assure you that all the hard work and sacrifice will be worth it in the long run.

Below are some podcast recommendations to understand where we are and where we are going:

- On the Horizon with Richard Windows – January and February 2024
- Golf Badgers – Episode 34



Borehole Update

We have now gained approval from SEPA to fully construct 2 boreholes, one beside our maintenance facility and one to the left of the 5th fairway. We have a provisional date of the 17th of June to start constructing these with Hydracrat coming on-site again to carry out the work. They are estimating it will take approx. 5 days to construct one borehole, so we expect them to be on-site for 2 working weeks. Although this will cause some noise disruption to golfers, we have made sure that the dates of construction do not interfere with key club dates such as the Tantallon/North Berwick Club Championships or the Esmond Trophy. The borehole will be constructed to a depth of approx. 80m with a diameter of 12.5” maximising the ability to pull water in the well.

It is important to mention that the recommendation is to secure the boreholes by doing the work now as they are unstable and could collapse if left too long. Once completed, the two boreholes will be capped until a new storage tank is constructed. I feel that if we put the infrastructure in place to supply our existing tank, we would be wasting money on excavation and resurfacing, only to redo this work again in the near future.

Yellow Tees

After holding a course walk in January with Catriona Matthew MBE and Ric Foulner regarding the position, condition, and visibility of the Yellow Tees, we are expecting the arrival of new tee posts for these tees in early June. We are also still waiting for the delivery of the yellow tee markers as well as the Blues. The White and Red tee markers are already present on the course. Once these tee posts arrive, we will start to put them out on the Yellow Tees which will help make them easier to spot and encourage more people to play from. Over the next few winters, new tees will be constructed to further elevate the standard of the Yellow course.

Rainfall Chart

	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	98.4
May	69.0	48	24.39	17
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	283.7

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