

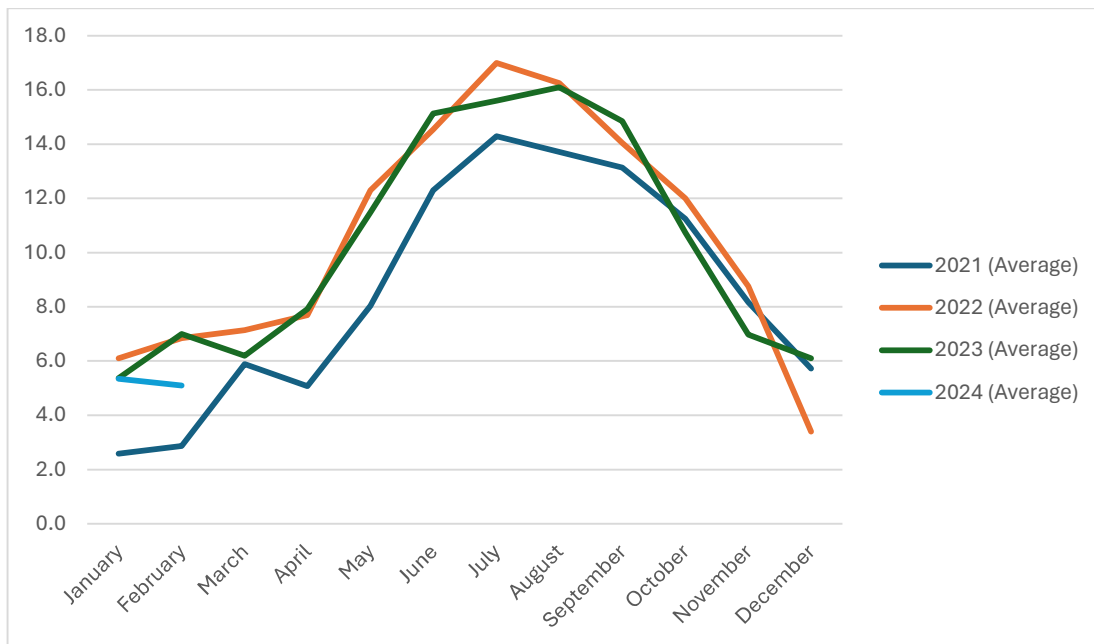


## Course Report – February 2024

### Current Conditions

As the old cliché goes, “the days are fairly stretching” and every year, the feeling that spring is around the corner is so exciting after the short dark days of winter. It will not be long until the start of the golfing seasons comes around and the West Links will be packed with members and visitors enjoying their golf under clear blue skies, warm temperatures and a slight breeze – wishful thinking maybe.....

Since starting at North Berwick 3 years ago, we started recording our weather data for every day including minimum and maximum temperature, daily rainfall and windspeeds. Now we are starting to be able to build up that database to compare conditions year on year. Although there are no clear trends at the moment, 2024 has started slightly cooler and wetter than 2022 and 2023, with the course being under snow at this point in 2021 for the best part of a week. It is always interesting to look back at data like this to compare and contrast seasons, and if the previous 3 years have taught us anything, it is to almost expect to have a cool and dry start to Spring which delays the proper growing season until May at the earliest. Hopefully, this is the year to buck the trend.



*Figure 1: Average temperatures for the last 4 years.*

Greens have held up well to the conditions and the sarrel roll that was undertaken in January has worked well to help penetrate moisture into the rootzone and to add a bit of air into the surface. There have been some small outbreaks of fusarium on some of the indicator greens, but as yet, we have not applied a fungicide for treating the disease, instead applying iron to keep the disease pressure away. It is also really pleasing to see the fescue seedlings that germinated in September/October still thriving and really starting to establish.

There has been a minimal amount of growth around the course but the team has been out to cut greens and fairways to keep on top of growth during the winter months.

## Winter Work Update

The team have been busy finishing off the tee's projects on 6, 10 and 16 with some turf needing to be laid to tie in some sections and also the final stages of the irrigation installation. Graeme Nisbet has done most of the irrigation work himself with help from different members of the team. Until August when Graeme spent time with the irrigation contractors, Applied Irrigation, during the installation for the Turf Nursery, he did not have any experience of irrigation maintenance or repair. Now he is a lot more confident and has gained valuable experience undertaking this work in-house.

The team have also been catching up on rebuilding bunkers since we came back in January with 10 of the planned bunkers either completed or nearing completion. Although we will not be able to do every bunker we highlighted in the dynamic plan, we have caught up well and the team have done a really impressive job rebuilding the revetted walls and also landscaping the surrounds to make the bunkers fit in their surroundings better.



*Figure 2: The bunker front right of 6 before being rebuilt. The walk-in on the left side of the photo was badly eroded and the face had been built inside the previous revetted wall.*



*Figure 3: The bunker rebuilt and shaped. Scott Russell admires the finished product.*

I am conscious of a few comments from members about some of the winter work and hopefully, I can put some of the concerns to rest:

- The new tees have been designed to have undulating edges, so it is on purpose that they are not “snooker table” level. This has been done to help them fit naturally into their surrounding and have a natural aesthetic. The teeing area has increased, so having some areas around the sides that are not “level” will not interfere with the teeing ground.
- Renovations of the planned pathways that have been carved up by the dumpers and diggers tracking over them will of course be undertaken. I know it is not great for members to see their course looking a little bit sore in places but unfortunately, with the project work we have done over the last year including the Bulk Materials Building, the Turf Nursery and the winter projects, this kind of disturbance was unavoidable. In the coming weeks, we will be digging this out and releveling the damaged paths with rootzone before turfing.
- Even though the newly revetted bunkers look deep, once the sand has been added, the depth of the bunkers will reduce quite considerably. They will remain a challenge to play out from, but they will be fun, fair, and flattering too.
- Out of the 72 bunkers on the main course, 32 have/will have new sand in them meaning we have just over half of the bunkers to install new sand. This is not a quick process, and we are tying this in with the bunker reconstruction to save wastage of materials.

### **Borehole Update**

The test drilling for finding a water source on the course has proved to be successful as out of the 4 test holes we drilled, 2 have come back with positive results at the 5<sup>th</sup> hole and beside our greenkeepers facility. We sent 6 samples from 3 test holes to the European Turfgrass Laboratory (ETL) for testing to see if it would be suitable as an irrigation source. We had hoped that the test hole at 16 might have been usable but after testing the samples, it was discounted due to a salt content that was too high for use on turf, but interestingly, was far below the threshold to be classed as seawater.

We now start to work with the environmental agencies to gain the necessary permissions and to ensure that we can abstract an amount of water that is appropriate for our site before we look to install production wells for abstraction.

Again, it is important to point out that there is still a lot of work to be done on this, but at this early stage, we are optimistic we will have our own water source on site.

### **Wee Course Bunkers**

Robert Sammels from R A Sammels began shaping the 3 bunkers on the Wee Course and then revetted them with an artificial turf bunker revetting material called EcoBunker. The bunkers on the Wee Course have been in an extremely poor condition for several years and it was felt that rebuilding them with EcoBunker was a way to ensure they remain in good condition for many years. The EcoBunker has a guarantee of over 20 years and works in the same way as normal bunker revetting. Over the next few weeks, the outskirts of the bunker will be turfed and will be back in play once the turf has settled and knitted in.



*Figure 4: The bunker on the 3<sup>rd</sup> had shrunk over the years.*



*Figure 5: The rebuilt bunker was made slightly bigger and then landscaped around the sides to tie in better with the surrounds.*



*Figure 6: The bunker on the 5<sup>th</sup> being shaped.*



*Figure 7: Robert putting the finishing touches to the bunker on 5.*

### **Staff Update**

We are delighted to welcome four new additions to the team. We had a very successful application window with over 30 applicants from a range of different backgrounds. On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> of February, we will welcome Jeff O'Malley and Cameron Gay, before Ross Johnson joins on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February. Gary Brown will complete the line-up on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March bringing the headcount up to 13. Jeff and Gary both have backgrounds in Greenkeeping with Cameron and Ross making a career change. These additions will make a huge difference to undertaking our daily maintenance with a view to do more refinement works over the course of the season.

Also in the past month, Lewis Connell passed his Pesticide Application 1 (Theory) course allowing him to undertake further Pesticide Application courses. Scott Russell passed the Pesticide Application 6 which enables him to use Knapsack Sprayers. In March, training for Pesticide Application 2 for the use of Boom Sprayers will be undertaken along with training on how to set cutting units and mowers and use the Grinders for sharpening reels and bed knives. This demonstrates the commitment we have to develop our staff and to support them in their careers.

## Rainfall

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>January</b>	80.0	20	26.2	48.1
<b>February</b>	51.0	66	33	37.4
<b>March</b>	24.0	19	78.4	
<b>April</b>	3.0	41	34	
<b>May</b>	69.0	48	24.39	
<b>June</b>	38.0	24	43.6	
<b>July</b>	39.5	36	48	
<b>August</b>	44.5	21	37.4	
<b>September</b>	39.5	67	50.4	
<b>October</b>	155.0	56	152.6	
<b>November</b>	23.0	94	89.54	
<b>December</b>	109.0	23	108.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>675.5</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>725.93</b>	<b>85.4</b>

**Kyle Cruickshank**  
**Course Manager**