



COURSE REPORT WINTER 2024

Course update

As we approach the end of the year it seems a good time to reflect on the course in 2024 as well as looking forward to the winter months, the implications on the golf course and the general plans throughout the winter. We believe that the course has moved once more in the right direction. Hard work and good agronomic practices have seen the course perform exceedingly well throughout the year. Unpredictable weather patterns mean adaptations to plans are inevitable, but I feel once again we have achieved a high standard on all playing surfaces. We must take this opportunity to keep driving forward and to keep implementing best working practices for our golf course. This combined with having the correct infrastructure to operate from, means that we can sustainably improve the course year on year. I would like to reiterate what was mentioned in the March report regarding modern restrictions and weather patterns. It is extremely important that as golfers we try to understand these issues as they are hugely influential in the playability of golf courses especially in the winter months, and will continue to do so in the future.

Weather issues and modern greenkeeping restrictions

A course such as Royal Cromer does not have the foundations to cope effectively with wetter winters as the course was built with very little drainage. Probably only 1% of the overall playing surfaces have any sort of implemented drainage in the form of carry pipes to move water away from the surface quicker after heavy rain. For many months of the year we are not negatively impacted from wet weather, so implementing piped systems wide spread across the course would not be cost effective or sustainable. In fact, installing drainage would have a significant negative impact on the course in periods of drought, which are becoming more commonplace. The golf club and the cliffs along this coastline, as you will know, are largely built on clay with sand pockets and natural soil. This means that we are not as naturally free draining as more sea level coastal courses. This has positives and negatives; one positive being that in the summer droughts our course will hold onto more moisture and nutritional values than other courses, a negative being that in the winter months the moisture levels remain higher than optimal. We have what are known as natural push up greens, with the majority being over 100 years old, they were constructed without drainage. In fact, the only green to have any sort of piped drainage is the 2nd, that was installed several years ago. This isn't a negative observation but in fact a positive one, USGA specification greens for example require more input management than ours in the form of nutrition and water. 99% of coastal courses are the same as our natural push up greens.

Over the past several years we have installed drainage into areas that may sit wet for any significant amount of time, for example the second part of the 2nd fairway, second half of the 4th fairway and the dip on the 5th fairway. This has dramatically improved the playability in these areas. Along with this we tackle the problem bunkers that hold water as an ongoing project within our winter works programme. To keep improving these and many other areas of the golf course, a big emphasis and resource must be concentrated into sand applications. Whether that be on fairways, greens, tees or indeed high traffic walkways. Sand plays such a key role in making these areas healthy and strong. Sand application helps to ameliorate the soil to make it indigenous for growing seed, it dilutes any thatch build up to keep the areas free draining, and also encourages good sward density, firmness and playability. What has been achieved in completing these projects is a course that recovers and becomes playable more quickly than ever before following periods of heavy rain.

Another notable factor in the challenges that face modern greenkeeping is the complete banning or control of certain chemical aids that would help us through these wet times. An example of this is the prohibiting of worm control application which negatively impacts the tracking of mud on the course. Also, the use of fungicides to control disease are due to become banned over coming years, which

means when golf courses have outbreaks of diseases that eats away at the playing surfaces there is nothing we can do apart from natural and cultural control to stop the spread of these problems. Of course, from an environmental point of view this is encouraging but from a greenkeeping point of view it presents a big challenge in being able to consistently produce the course to the highest standard possible.

Winter conditioning and traffic management

One issue that has quickly become one of the biggest problems in the autumn and winter months on golf courses is worm casting control. Problems caused by worm casts include agronomic issues, playability issues and machinery damage. As mentioned above we are now prohibited in controlling worms via chemicals and must culturally control them. We adopt a number of methods to control worm casting including the removal of dew from the greens, surrounds and tees by brushing or switching. For areas such as fairways, we drag a rope that rotates and disperses the cast. We also have a mechanical brush that can help with this, although this is more effective as a tillering tool to stand the grass up through the worm casts, to allow for a healthier sward and profile. We try to implement these practices on a daily basis where possible, but we are dictated to by the weather; if it is too damp or too wet, we can effectively make things worse by using the rope or brush.



Throughout the winter months we adopt a traffic management system with more directional markers, rope and stake and a course direction change. We adopt these practices to protect the course through the winter months so that we can present the course to the highest of standard throughout the main playing season. As you will have noticed this has happened a lot later into the winter months than before, the good weather this November has helped with this, but it also is evidence that the good nutritional, aeration and sanding programmes all go to aid course conditioning into the winter months. With a lot of the architectural changes to the course over the last few years, a winter route has been introduced to save on wear and tear in the main playing walkways and tees. Playing habits have changed over the years and there is now more traffic on golf courses throughout the year than ever before. Therefore, along with the restrictions to greenkeeping mentioned above, there is far more strain on the course when recovery through natural growth is limited. With this in mind we will bring in place our course winter route on **MONDAY 23rd DECEMBER (1-5 11,10,6,7,8,9,12, 13-18)** we will also start to use more of the winter tees on such holes as 3,4,5,8.

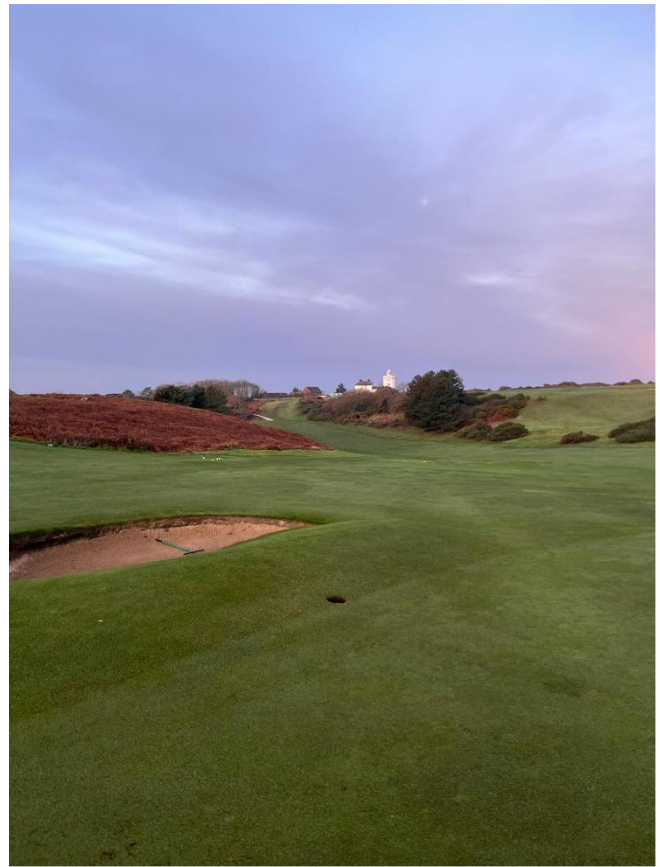
Winter works

As mentioned in the course autumn report it is intended that we will undertake less intrusive projects this winter. There will be little disruption to your rounds in the upcoming months, but the planned works will still enable us to continuously improve the course and the experience for members. Planned works to bunkers are already underway with the bunker renovations at the 2nd already completed and the left-hand greenside bunker at the 1st dug out ready to be built. We will look to complete several more

by the end of March in line with our bunker improvement plan. As part of this plan, we will be looking into the access in and out of certain bunkers and improve these where possible. Along with this we will be looking to astroturf any steps that lead to tees, as has been successfully implemented at 7 and 13. Over the next few winters we will be looking to move a percentage of the course bunkers to the revetted style that you will have seen being built over the last few years. These bunkers have been test bunkers to see if they can withstand the elements and the amount of play the course receives. I'm sure you'll agree that these bunkers stand out aesthetically, as well as present a fair challenge!



A fundamental aspect of our course improvement plan is to re-introduce more Maritime style characteristics and move away from the "inland" feel of certain areas. The improvements in natural grass pathways where possible and the return to cockleshell where it is not possible to sustainably grow grass along with the bunker changes all go towards this vision. Further winter works will include controlling vegetation around various parts of the course. These may include clearance of areas, gorse maintenance, whip clearance or a complete fell of undesirable or non-native species of vegetation. Overgrown and out of control vegetation is also fast becoming a major factor in golf course maintenance across the country. Examples of overgrown vegetation can be found in various locations across the site. These include the non-indigenous trees that have been allowed to grow on both sides of the 15th hole as well as other areas. Along with detrimental impacts on turf management and golfer playability, they also impact on the stunning visuals we're fortunate to have on the course (photos below of the lighthouse from the 15th green). Through positive vegetation works over previous years, areas such as the back of the 2nd green and the right-hand side of the 6th hole have improved both course agronomics and vistas including making the pier viewable from the 6th tee. We have a major asset in a working lighthouse that is the envy of golf courses up and down the country, yet we are hiding it from different vantage points across holes 2,14,15,16 and 18. Many of you will remember that the lighthouse was once visible from both the 2nd and 16th greens. These operations are vital not only to the playability of the course, but to encourage better light and airflow to improve agronomic practices thus resulting in better playability. This is seen as one of our biggest challenges over the coming years but is so vitally important to the development of the course. We are extremely fortunate to have such wonderful assets around the site, and it's imperative that we retain these as key features of the Club and indeed the Club as being intertwined with the community.



To conclude, we're very proud of how the course has been presented in 2024 despite some very challenging conditions at times. We're excited with the progression of the greens facility project which will futureproof our infrastructure to help us achieve our ambition of continually improving the course. Although on a smaller scale, our planned winter works will balance members enjoyment over the coming months with incremental improvements to the course itself, and come the spring I'm sure everyone will be looking forward to another great season of golf ahead at Royal Cromer.

GREENS COMMITTEE