

GEO Certified® Independent Verification Report



Golf Facility: West Lancashire Golf Club

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Date: July 2017

Executive Summary

The on-site survey was conducted by Tony Hanson from Environmental Solutions International (ESI) on the 4/7/17 with Stuart Hogg MG, Course Manager at West Lancashire Golf Club (WLGC) and James Hutchinson, BIGGA Ecologist.

West Lancashire Golf Club dates back to the 1870's making it one of the oldest golf clubs in the country, and also appears within the top 100 courses in the United Kingdom. The West Lancashire Golf Club is a members club, with a representative Board implementing members direction via a full time management team.

The Club is situated to the north of Liverpool close to the suburb of Crosby on a stretch of coast on the Irish Sea. The 18-hole course is therefore a links by nature with a dunes system forming a border between the golf course and the coast. Interestingly this dunes system is a relatively recent addition dating back to World War II when rubble resulting from the numerous air attacks on the city was dumped along the coast. The resulting dunes have been assimilated into the natural environment by a range of pioneer species resulting in a natural looking habitat.

The clubhouse and car park are situated to the southern end of the site with an entrance through a row of houses that border the southern edge of the golf course and practice ground. The maintenance area occupies an area, some half a mile distant from the clubhouse, on the eastern edge of the site in close proximity to the rail line.

The site is bounded by SSSI designations to the west and north, and understandably the course itself is highlighted as a SSSI Impact Risk Zone with areas of the site designated National Forestry Inventory (GB) - Broadleaf and sections also noted as Priority Habitat Inventory - Coastal Sand Dunes, Lowland Dry Acid Grass-land and Deciduous Woodland England.

Nature

The Club has been working very closely with James Hutchinson to develop an ecological management plan taking into account the range of identified habitats and species on-site. The plan is relatively complex due to the extreme variety of habitat and species and is being implemented and reviewed as part of a broader sustainability programme.

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As identified in the executive summary, the course is host to a number of important habitats identified as priorities under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. However, the site itself does not have any statutory designation areas. The close proximity of the SSSI and the course's identification as a SSSI Impact Risk Zone has underlined the management awareness of their responsibilities in terms of protecting not only their own site, but also the surrounding landscape.

In addition to James Hutchinson's work identifying and recording the various wildlife habitats and species found on site, there is an active programme of engagement including wildlife walks, and talks, being arranged to improve and increase appreciation amongst players and the wider community of the ecological benefits provided by the site.

The Club is intending to continue the implementation of the ecological management plan with future plans to plant a naturalised hedgerow to the west of the site, and to continue work with the Canal and Rivers Trust and Wildlife Trusts, to enhance habitats and to provide additional nest boxes and more naturalised habitats for invertebrates and birds.

The Club has gone through an assessment of the existing grassing plan over the last 2 years. The review has resulted in a significant revision of playing areas with some areas of heavy penalising rough being reduced and less trafficked areas being allowed to naturalise. The result has seen reduced playing times while still allowing areas of naturalised grassland to flourish, creating a more comfortable balance and broad approval from the players.

The turfgrass species cultivated and encouraged provide a balance of fine species, bents and fescues including brown tops (*Agrostis tenuis*) and sheep's fescue (*Festuca ovina*), along with courser species such as perennial rye (*Lolium perenne*) and annual meadow (*Poa annua*) grass. The result is a naturalised sward suited to the largely free draining sand subsoil providing drought tolerance and disease resistance without the requirement for significant chemical intervention.

Pesticide use is restricted in favour of more cultural interventions and physical management of the site with small area treatments rather than blanket spraying on an assessed-need basis. The resulting pesticide application records reviewed reinforced the pervading management ethos of minimal and targeted use.

The Club is building up a map of the course in terms of identifying problem areas where the stress levels result in unacceptable levels of pests and diseases, to allow targeted monitoring, and early actions that will hopefully reduce the need for chemical reactive interventions, whilst improving the playing experience for the golfer.

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The Club operates spray buffer zones and also has no spray zones in certain locations around the course due to the possibility of fugitive chemicals across the site and beyond its boundaries.

The maintenance area stores chemicals, fertilisers and fuels which are all contained within the drainage pad for the wash down area. The closed loop recycling pad is also used for chemical mixing ensuring containment of all hazardous substances.

Waste awaiting collection is stored in closed containers and the club has a formal waste contract agreement with a correctly licenced approved contractor.

Clippings and green waste are being reviewed currently, with the possibility of identifying areas on the course that are out of sight of the players to create formal compost bays. The maintenance area also has wooden bays being used for combinations of bunker sand mixes, through to recycled soil to be reused.

Water quality is tested annually with additional daily checks together with a monitoring regime to ensure stock levels of chemicals and fuels held on site.

Resources

The Club uses a combination of abstracted borehole water for irrigation, mains potable supply and mains sewerage for the clubhouse, and a small septic tank for the maintenance yards.

The quantity of water used for irrigation has not been an issue to date although recent conversations and correspondence with the environment agency have resulted in a reduction in the abstraction licence which appears to be common across the industry.

The irrigation is managed and distributed by Rain Bird infrastructure, and provides significant opportunities for control of volumes and the use of specific sprinklers for greens or wider identified areas to ensure that water use is restricted to absolute necessity. The use of a weather station and records maintained by the Club, combined with the use of wetting agents, result in irrigation use being minimised and as efficient as possible.

Clubhouse consumption has remained broadly in line with occupation of the facilities, although there may be some opportunities to reduce consumption through stakeholder awareness.

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No formal water audits have been undertaken, however the Club does review consumption on a regular basis primarily to identify any potential anomalies that may be the result of leaks or failures within the system.

The clubhouse buildings date back to the late 1980s when a significant project was undertaken to replace the existing clubhouse with a more modern and usable facility.

The building has subsequently been upgraded with the introduction of significant levels of LED lighting together with a major upgrade to the boiler and heating system including computer-control to ensure efficient heating and acceptable comfort levels across the building.

In terms of levels of consumption, the figures reflect the clubhouse use and occupation and regular reviews are undertaken of the consumption and spend levels, to help identify opportunities to reduce consumption of gas or electricity, through facility upgrades or stakeholder engagement.

The Club is working with its partners and suppliers to help to identify potential reductions in waste packaging and also delivery miles together with reviews of the waste and recycling systems within their own operations.

Where possible the Club engages local suppliers although this is more prevalent in the services and perishable foods operations of the business.

Community

West Lancs Golf Club has been, and will continue to work with local wildlife and special-interest groups to help improve relations and understanding of the benefits provided by the golf industry to stakeholders and the natural environment.

Key elements of this work have been staff training, notice boards and electronic media allowing broadcast of information relating to the environmental commitments to reducing energy, waste and improving the natural environment. The addition of talks and meeting providing a question and answer format should provide a fantastic platform to enhance and improve engagement over the coming years.

The Club also engages in numerous charitable projects and events, both hosted events and with staff committing time to external events.

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Conclusion

I, Tony Hanson, independent accredited verifier, recommend West Lancashire Golf Club to be awarded the GEO Certified® ecolabel because they have demonstrated their commitment to sustainability in their operations and achieved the requirement of GEO certification.

West Lancashire Golf Club have undertaken a range of projects to help improve sustainability whilst offering a fantastic golf facility.

The Club's review of their operations has resulted in reshaped fairways, to improve playing times while also allowing longer grass in areas that are out of play. In addition to areas of naturalised grassland there are also areas of sympathetically managed open water, broadleaf woodland and even dry stone walling bounding the course.

The clubhouse has benefitted from LED upgrades in a number of areas around the building, significantly reduce lighting consumption, and changes to the heating system will also help reduce the consumption of energy as well as improving comfort levels.

The Club has also held wildlife talks to help members understand the variety and importance of the species on site and also the importance of its proximity to the SSSI areas and other important habitats bordering the course.