

# GEO Certified® Independent Verification Report



**Golf Facility: Royal Portrush Golf Club**  
**Prepared by: Matt Johns**  
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## Executive Summary

Royal Portrush Golf Club is a highly successful members club situated on the edge of the town of Portrush on the North Antrim Coast of Northern Ireland. It is situated amongst dramatic sand dune systems with nationally important coastal landscapes forming its northern boundary and adding further notable interest. This creates a very challenging playing experience that benefits heavily on the natural landscape, geomorphology and ecology. These natural assets are highly-regarded and the course management is fully aligned to sustainable golf principals. The club includes a range of facilities including two very high-quality 18-hole courses, practice facilities, a state of the art new greenkeeping facility and high-quality clubhouse.

The quality of the facilities and experience at Royal Portrush is recognised by its success at hosting numerous professional and amateur competitions, including hosting The Open Championships for only the second time in July this year.

The audit was attended by the course manager, Graeme Beatt, also present at the original 2015 verification.

## Nature

It was clear in 2015 that the team at Royal Portrush Golf Club were very aware of the very special and sensitive ecological habitats and biodiversity within and associated with the club. As part of its course development and management planning, it had secured advice and expertise from external specialists including the STRI and Government Agencies, resulting in a number of baseline surveys being completed and an Ecological Management Plan being key to the ongoing management of the habitats associated with the course and its surrounds. This approach has been continued ensuring ongoing management is compliant with relevant ecological policy and legislation and also identifies the opportunities to result in further valued habitat creation, restoration and enhancement. This includes high-quality works associated with sand dunes, slacks, ponds and ditches, scrub and grassland and eradication of invasive non-native species from the two courses.

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The past three years have seen an impressive delivery of ecological works, that also compliment the opportunity to showcase golf and biodiversity through The Open competition. Key elements include significant removal of invasive and species-poor scrub to create up areas of new open sand, new sand dunes, a new dune slack and restoration and protection of native sand dune vegetation.

The invasive species Japanese Rose has been eradicated from most of the course and efforts are underway to manage Himalayan balsam that is being transported to site from upstream sources. Scrub removal has retained the root systems to ensure ongoing dune stability in those locations. The rough is managed by cutting and collecting arising, reducing nutrient levels promoting species-rich areas.

A high-quality publication “Royal Portrush Golf Club: A Wild Year” has been produced and is in circulation, providing a visible record of the work the club, the successful outcomes in terms of biodiversity and a very engaging seasonal record of the habitats, flora and fauna present. It includes a number of activities and as such represents an excellent opportunity for nature conservation education and the promotion of sustainable golf at the highest level and the event of The Open extends this an international audience.

The focus remains on encouraging disease and drought tolerant species of grass to maintain high-quality links playing surfaces, also limiting pesticide inputs. An integrated approach to monitoring input requirements using soil and meteorological data in conjunction with on the ground observations continues to be successful at keeping the turf grass healthy with minimal stress. Physical works including aeration, good cutting practices and soil condition further to support very high-quality playing surfaces. The course manager is very proactive with communication to members and visitors about course conditions including the use of social media.

The club takes the approach of minimising the use of chemicals and hazardous materials. A new state of the art greenkeeping facility has been constructed over the last three years that provides very high-quality facilities for the safe and secure storage of such materials as well as maintenance of equipment. A new waste to water closed-loop treatment system has been installed for wash down and provides further efficiencies in water consumption as well as pollution prevention.

All staff are trained in pollution prevention and spill kits and pollution response procedures have been prepared. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency monitors water quality in the local area and no notices of pollution or poor water quality from the club have arisen in the last three years. As such, Royal Portrush continues to operate in accordance with all relevant legislation.

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### Resources

Royal Portrush continues to use water sourced from its own boreholes and stored in its reservoir for course irrigation, with mains water being used for the clubhouse, greenkeeping facilities, halfway houses and for a new drinking water fountains on the course. Efforts continue with regards to minimising water use, noting the influence of annual weather conditions. These relate to reducing the areas being subject to irrigation, the selection of drought-tolerant turfgrass species, and the use of wetting agents.

A new state-of-the-art greenkeeping facility has been installed since the original GEO verification assessment. This incorporates a range of water efficiency devices within the building including motion sensor-controlled toilet flushing, which are also included in the rebuilt halfway house toilets. Water efficiencies have also been introduced through the installation of a new wash down and wastewater treatment system.

Energy is sourced from one of the larger energy suppliers, with price sensitivity remaining the key factor in selecting supplier and source and limited opportunity to secure low-cost renewable energy. Notwithstanding this, there are ongoing commitments to minimising energy use across the facility as documented previously. Improvements have been made with lighting within the greenkeeping facilities with the new building now including motion sensors, which have also been introduced in the main clubhouse locker rooms.

An initiative to promote car sharing has been successful with the greenkeeping staff. Buggies have been changed to electric variants, with charging now occurring during the night rather than the day to contribute reducing demand on the grid at peak times. There is good communication with the members and staff on ways to minimise energy usage which can help support similar behaviour away from the club.

Royal Portrush Golf Club continues to operate a robust system of waste minimisation, material reuse and recycling. New initiatives have been implemented including a drive to reduce material consumption through accurate stock control, durability of products and minimising plastic bag and paper usage. The club has a sustainable purchasing policy seeks to source materials, products and subcontractors from local suppliers wherever feasible and prioritises purchasing fair trade products. Materials from course management are collected for composting and reuse and these include soils, sands, cores and clippings. The club has been successful at establishing several new fairways from grass cores.

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### Community

The club retains a strong sustainability working group comprising key members of staff and the Greens Committee which has the role of reviewing and approving works derived from the Ecological Management Plan for the club. All members are key up to date on GEO initiatives and sustainability measures across the club via a blog, the club website, emails, information board and meetings. This also provides a high level of communication to local residents and external parties. A number of conservation volunteering events have been run to help with dune management, hedgerow maintenance and fencing. The club prides itself on training provision including links with local college courses, in house training for its greenkeeping team, use of professional publications and on the job training with the STRI. The club ensures it maintains good relations with its neighbours e.g. over changes in course management activities.

### Conclusion

I, Matthew Johns, independent accredited verifier, recommend Royal Portrush to be awarded the GEO Certified® ecolabel because it continues to achieve a very high standard in sustainable golf management, learning from professional guidance and its own initiatives, showing continual improvement in a wide range of aspects and demonstrating an ongoing commitment to further improvements and leadership in this area. Whilst the Open Championship is a very large event on the club's agenda this has not diminished the passion, skills and ability to maintain and improve on the high standards demonstrated when the club was originally appointed GEO Certified.

The quality and condition of the assemblage of sand dune habitats and the subtle integration of the high-quality playing surfaces with these natural features is a particular highlight, that will showcase sustainable golf to millions of global views through the Open Championship.