



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report Montrose Golf Links

Prepared by independent verifier: Stuart Rennie

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2023
Recertification due: 2028

GEO Certified®

 **GEO
Foundation**
Sustainability in and through golf

“The 5th oldest golf course in Scotland, Montrose Links has been making great strides to improve its environmental standing and sustainable practices since its initial certification. The Links continues to develop and deliver in the three key themes of nature, resources, and community. Further and continual data collection will help with future analysis in maintaining high standards as well as improving where possible.”

Stuart Rennie
(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Montrose Golf Links has successfully achieved GEO Certified® status for its outstanding work to foster nature, conserve resources and support the community.

GEO Certified® is the most respected certification for golf, based on a credibly and transparently developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Montrose Golf Links has:

1. Met the required certification criteria for sustainable golf operations
2. Successfully completed the official third-party verification process
3. Successfully passed the final evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd. (autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation)

GEO agreed with the conclusions of the official verification report, that, having achieved all mandatory criteria; and with specific Continual Improvement Points (CIP) set for the future and Critical CIP's (CCIPs) to be reviewed at recertification, Montrose Golf Links should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Montrose Golf Links can therefore claim a position as a leader in advancing sustainability in golf – making important contributions in protecting nature, conserving resources and strengthening communities.

The GEO Certified® Report that follows comments on the actions undertaken against the criteria, as observed by the independent verifier during the assurance process.

Certification is nearly always the result of a dedicated team effort resulting in many practical and valuable social and environmental results around the golf course, maintenance facility and clubhouse. These dedication and leadership qualities are an important part of ensuring the resilience of the golf facility and the golf industry into the future and also as part of society's wider effort to pull together for people and planet.

We congratulate all involved.

Jonathan Smith
Founder and Executive Director, GEO Foundation
GEO Certification Ltd. Board Member

Kelli Jerome
Executive Director, GEO Foundation

Carole Kerrey
Manager, Data and Reporting, GEO
Certification Ltd.



Verification and Certification

Verification

The official third-party audit was carried out by an independent verifier, accredited by GEO to undertake verifications of golf facilities applying for certification.

Verification involves reviewing practices and data, using the International Voluntary Standard for Sustainable Golf Operations as the guide to ensure comprehensive and consistent evaluation of performance. A detailed verification report is submitted for evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd, a subsidiary of GEO Foundation.

Certification

GEO Certification Ltd, an autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation [both not-for-profit entities], undertook a full review of all content submitted through the OnCourse® online platform and the report submitted by the verifier, ensuring:

- Comprehensiveness – that activities undertaken touched on all elements of the Standard
- Consistency – that the verification approach was balanced, well weighted and with consistent depth of evaluation across each theme
- Accuracy - matching the verification report with evidence submitted by the golf facility to ensure statements and claims were accurate

GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit founded to advocate, support and reward sustainability in and through golf. Over more than ten years, the group has worked collaboratively with dozens of golf industry associations and government and non-government organisations around the world, to help golf become a sustainability leader, striving for a net positive social and environmental impact. In addition to managing and assuring GEO Certified®, GEO Foundation also provides a suite of credible, practical programmes for golf facility management, new golf developments and golf tournaments called OnCourse®, often delivered in partnership with national golf bodies. Find out more at www.sustainable.golf

Credibility

GEO Certified® is part of the ISEAL Alliance, a group of the world's foremost credible certification systems including Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council and many others. GEO Foundation earned and retains full membership of the ISEAL Alliance global association following a rigorous evaluation against the ISEAL Codes of Credibility in Sustainability Standards and Certification. The ISEAL Codes cover standard-setting, assurance, and monitoring and evaluation. Find out more at www.isealliance.org



Verifier's Report

The Sustainability Agenda for golf covers the following themes and action areas:

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	• Habitats & Biodiversity • Turfgrass management • Pollution prevention
Resources	• Water • Energy • Materials
Community	• Partnerships & Outreach • Golfing & Employment • Advocacy & Communications

Included below are the observations made by the Independent Verifier against each item in the Standard.

NATURE			
N1 Habitats and Biodiversity			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
N1.1 Understand the site and surroundings	N1.1.1 Sound understanding of the nature and landscape value of the site	Map all habitats and vegetation types on the site; Regularly update landscape / biodiversity surveys	The course manager and general manager have a very sound understanding of the overall site, including its habitats and vegetation types. The club formally worked with STRI with regards to ecological/habitat reports. Although still valid, these have not

			been updated since the previous certification in 2018. The R&A and STRI provide ongoing agronomical support. CIP: Please update habitat plans and reports when appropriate.
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Understand legal responsibilities for protected landscapes and species; Record and monitor protected, endangered, or rare species found on the site	There are no designations directly associated with the Montrose facilities but there are other designations locally. From time-to-time Sand Martin's take up home on the open faced dune that fronts the beach. Unfortunately, this is constantly impacted by coastal erosion therefore protection cannot be monitored.
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	There are elements, such as pill boxes, which are remnants of the war in areas. Some have been lost to coast erosion and are not protected. The club understands its historical past being the 5th Oldest club in the world. Coastal erosion is a concern to the club and its heritage. The risk to the golf course and the town is moderately significant and should be discussed at local council and perhaps government level.
N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the course	N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass	Observe, track and / or monitor golfer play	It could be said that there is a much clearer strategy with regards to managed turfgrass areas on the golf course since the new greenkeeper took over. The club as a whole are functioning better as a business which in turn allows them to invest in their facilities. This has seen more productivity with more staff, more use of materials and water (there was previously a lack of investment in the course facilities). This has helped create better playing surfaces with more interest and demand to play by visitors. Less fairway is being cut which is helping improve productivity. CIP: Please measure and keep records of managed turfgrass area. CIP: Please continue to identify underutilised areas of managed turfgrass for further naturalisation.
N1.3 Actively manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	Regularly review and follow a habitat management plan; Prioritise native species when planting and landscaping	Gorse management is a continual process which allows for improved rough grassland management and wider playing corridors. Some gorse is old and woody in areas. This is selectively removed year-on-year but still has a strong

			regeneration rate. Gorse has been significantly removed from the smaller course which has improved with light and air flow and visibility. Rabbit damage is an ongoing issue that is being managed.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		No updated habitat surveys have been carried out.
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turf and soil health	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors	Select appropriate grass species for climate	Varied overseeding carried out on greens, tees and fairways with cool season and drought tolerant species and harder wearing rye to improve areas where growth was lacking. The longer roughs and semi-roughs are cut and collected on a yearly basis to reduce rank grass encroaching.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		Soils are tested on a 6 month basis and good aeration practices are implemented throughout the season. Testing is carried out on any noticeable problem areas as and when required. CIP: Please compile any test result data and keep on file.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	Testing can inform the requirement for fertilising. This should be monitored and documented moving forwards. The club do test as above and have annual agronomy visits by STRI and recommendation visits/support from the R&A as well. CIP: Please ensure up-to-date reports are uploaded to the OnCourse platform.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	Blades are regularly sharpened onsite to ensure that plants are cut rather than ripped, minimising disease. Spraying only occurs if absolutely necessary. The application of fertilisers is part of the nutrition programme. This helps to maintain healthy soils and keep plants strong. CPI: Sharpening blades more often may be beneficial as per the STRI report.

N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	Establish patterns and levels of risk for pests and diseases; Scout the course daily for early signs of pests and disease; Accurate pest and disease identification; Map and track pest and disease hotspots; Establish pest and disease thresholds	There is no mapping as such, but the course manager is well aware of problem areas and areas where nothing is required at all. CIP: Understanding cut area versus fertiliser / pesticide consumption would be useful to track.
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use only legally registered and approved products; Ensure staff are fully qualified and licenced to use pesticides; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Use appropriate protective equipment; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of turf .	Standard practice. All staff who spray are qualified. A contractor collects containers and bags for disposal.
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from golf course operations	Document procedures for emergency spill responses; Maintain mowing buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Maintain spraying and spreading buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Create a map / aerial visual reproduction, drawing etc of the course showing buffer zones and no-spray, no-spread areas.	Buffers are maintained when spraying near water. Application by knapsack occurs where necessary as per application instructions of specific products. CIP: A simple policy document could be prepared moving forward.
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Ensure all hazardous materials are safely and securely stored; Ensure compliance with all required standards and systems for hazardous waste and wastewater discharge	Chemical storage is minimal and kept separate. A natural reed bed system is located next to the wash area.
	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Ensure wash areas are on impermeable, leak-free surfaces; Mixing and loading of pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	Chemicals stored under COSHH regulations.

N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances	Maintain a register of hazardous materials available to authorised staff; Safe storage in secure and ventilated concrete or metal building; Sufficient storage capacity; Impermeable flooring; Spill containment kits present; Emergency wash area; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area; Secondary containment for fuel, either externally constructed, or integrally manufactured; Regular inspection of storage tanks	Yes. All standard practice.
N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage and discharge licences	Wastewater discharge licence; Appropriate treatment of machinery wash water (impermeable surface, oil / grease / clipping separation)	As above. Reed bed natural filtration system adjacent to the cleaning facility.

RESOURCES			
R1 Water			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
R1.1 Minimise water demand	R1.1.1 Measures to reduce the need to consume water	Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces only	The course manager limits his water consumption and works with natural weather conditions as best as possible. The club have recently started monitoring their water consumption. More water use on the course is a result of a very dry and hot 21/22. Water is used to ensure that a healthy golf course is presented. CIP. Please continue to monitor and record annual / monthly data.
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course	Conduct regular irrigation performance checks; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices;	The use of wetting agents and moisture meters allows the club manager to monitor the output of water use in a more detailed manner.

		Ensure effective application of water to target areas; Ensure irrigation schedules are informed by weather patterns and soil moisture analysis	CIP: Please conduct an irrigation system audit as and when required.
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Audit water use regularly; Review bills frequently and look for irregularities; Encourage water-saving practices amongst staff and visitors; Categorise and track water consumption	Water auditing in the administration office is minimal. There is a toilet and small kitchen used by the general manager and the pro. Less staff in this area is already going to mean less use of water and energy.
R1.3 Source water responsibly	R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water	Ensure appropriate water abstraction permit and reporting, as required	Water is extracted from a bore hole and stored in a tank. Water use has gone up given that the business is more streamlined and can afford to use water. This is being monitored.
R2 Energy			
R2.1 Reduce energy demand	R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in course maintenance	Minimise areas of managed turf to reduce mowing, irrigation, and turf inputs	Less fairway area is cut which results in more productivity. In turn roughs/semis are managed less with cutting and collecting being carried out once or twice annually. By mowing less area, fuel consumption will be down. CIP: Please monitor reductions in maintained area and associated impacts on resource consumption. CIP: Please also consider monitoring manhours for different tasks.
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	Audit energy use regularly; Regularly review bills; Categorise and track energy consumption	The club only have a small office administration/pro shop and green sheds where energy use is minimal.
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy	Determine potential sources of renewable energy in the area and on-site, through renewable energy providers	This has been considered in the past but was not implemented. There are no clubhouses associated to Montrose Links Ltd other than the admin/proshop building, which is small.
R3 Materials			

R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives	Undertake a review of materials consumed	The club recycles any waste and carries out its own composting for re-use on the course. Water is available to re-fill bottles in the shop.
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	R3.2.1 Practical use of an ethical / environmental purchasing policy	Adopt a sustainable, or ethical / environmental purchasing policy to maximise the use of locally sourced goods and goods made from recycled, recyclable and certified materials	Many goods are bought locally for the course, but no specific policy document statement has been created yet. CIP: Please consider creating a formal sustainable purchasing policy, emphasising local suppliers where possible.
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity	Demonstrate waste separation, reuse and recycling; Track how much waste goes to landfill, or is reused / recycled	Waste is recycled as per the local authority requirements and any necessary contracted removal of chemical containers and bags.
R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations	Use authorised waste and recycling contractor for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste	Yes. As above.

COMMUNITY			
C1 Outreach			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Diversify access and provide multi-functionality	C1.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility		Various interactions with local community groups.

C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		Members volunteer to assist with the likes of course management and gorse removal. Club provides a cash injection to community groups annually.
C1.3 Establish active community partnerships	C1.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups	Create a 'sustainability working group'	The club work with schools on different educational projects. They also offer work experience to kids who wish not to attend school. CIP: Please consider creating a sustainability working group comprising stakeholders from across the golf facility and surrounding community. This could be useful in highlighting and addressing issues around costal erosion.
C2 Golfers & Employees			
C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities		Encouraging seniors and juniors to play in events.
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	The club is mixed and has a varied membership across all age ranges.
C2.3 Employ fairly and safely, and provide career opportunities	C2.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development	Follow all relevant national legislation and best practice for employment, health & safety etc	The club follows all guidelines when employing and look to promote within when possible.
C3 Communications			
C3.1 Engage golfers and members	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors	Provide information on the facility's sustainability commitments, actions, or achievements	This is something that could be implemented on the website to create more awareness of all the good that the club and course manager are already doing. CIP: Please improve communication via website i.e., adding a sustainability section highlighting certification and other initiatives.

	C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community	Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement	There is an element of awareness within the club, but they could do more to promote this. CIP: Please enhance efforts to engage and educate members, visitors, and the surrounding community.
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Golf and Sustainability

Among all sports, golf has a particularly close relationship with the environment and communities, golf facilities can bring many benefits to people and nature - from the protection of greenspace and conservation of biodiversity; healthy recreation for all ages; local supply chains; and jobs, tourism and other forms of economic value.

Adopting a more sustainable approach is also good for golf. It's about presenting a high-quality golf course and providing a memorable experience in natural surroundings. It's about being as efficient as possible. And it's about supporting the community in a range of ways that bring increased recognition, respect and contact.

At a broader level, it's important that golf credibly demonstrates its commitment, and its social and environmental value – strengthening the sport's image and reputation for the long term.

Golf facilities that participate in OnCourse®, an international sustainability initiative assured by the non-profit GEO Foundation, are taking a comprehensive approach and striving to be leaders in the community.

Find out more at www.sustainable.golf