



GEO Certified® Report

Royal Birkdale Golf Club

Prepared by independent verifier Tony Hanson

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2024
Recertification due: 2027

“Royal Birkdale Golf Club demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability, with well-documented habitat and biodiversity work across its dune landscape. The club manages turfgrass responsibly, supports priority species, and has reduced managed areas to encourage naturalisation.

Resource use is efficient, with targeted irrigation, licensed abstraction, and energy consumption tracking informing ongoing improvements. Waste is well-managed through separation and recycling.

Community engagement includes charity support, staff development, and sustainability communications. The club shows leadership in environmental stewardship and operates to a high standard across nature, resources, and community, with clear systems for continual improvement.”

*Tony Hanson
(GEO accredited independent verifier)*



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Royal Birkdale Golf Club 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.

Royal Birkdale Golf Club 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, Royal Birkdale Golf Club should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Royal Birkdale Golf Club 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
Director, Certification and Credibility,
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	Understand all habitats and vegetation types on the site; Regularly update landscape / biodiversity knowledge and records	Biodiversity and habitat records were discussed and reviewed The club maintains updated biodiversity knowledge and habitat maps. On-site observations confirmed a variety of habitats including dune, scrub, and grassland ecosystems.
	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	The site includes areas designated as part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Discussions with the greenkeeping team confirmed compliance with Natural England guidance. Records of protected species and designated habitat zones are actively maintained and respected.
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	No designated archaeological or cultural heritage sites were identified on the golf course. Verbal confirmation received that any findings would be reported to the relevant authority and protection measures would be followed as per national guidance.
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	Course management actively monitors wear and traffic patterns to identify underutilised turf areas. Several non-play areas have already been naturalised, contributing to habitat expansion and input reduction.

	N1.3 Actively manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	Prioritise native species when planting and landscaping	Habitat management plans prioritise native species and incorporate structured projects, including gorse management and creation of sand scrapes. Staff are knowledgeable and committed to ongoing ecological enhancement.
	N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		Specific actions support key species such as sand lizards and skylarks. Conservation measures include seasonal access restrictions and habitat protection zones. These efforts are aligned with local conservation priorities.
	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	Turfgrass species have been selected based on suitability for coastal links conditions, prioritising fine Fescues and Bent grasses. Discussions confirmed that selections are informed by local climate resilience and traditional play characteristics.
		N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		Regular aeration, sand topdressing, and organic matter management are in place. Observations and discussion confirmed a proactive approach to maintaining healthy soil structure across greens and fairways.
		N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	Nutrient inputs are guided by regular soil testing. Fertiliser application is targeted, minimal, and consistent with best practice. Fertiliser use is tracked and justified based on analysis results.

	N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture;	Integrated pest management (IPM) is practiced, with strong emphasis on cultural and mechanical strategies such as dew removal and mowing regimes. Minimal chemical inputs are used as a last resort.
	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	Daily turf monitoring identifies issues early. Chemicals are only used where necessary, following clear thresholds. Application records show a responsible and reduced-use approach.
		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	All chemicals are legally approved, stored securely, and applied by licensed staff. PPE and calibrated equipment were observed. Leftover products are disposed of responsibly on untreated turf areas.
	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	Procedures for emergency spill responses; Maintain mowing buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas;	Buffer zones around water bodies were observed, and no-spray areas are clearly identified.

		Maintain spraying and spreading buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas;	An emergency spill response plan is in place, and staff are trained accordingly.
	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	Hazardous materials are stored in compliant facilities with spill containment measures. Waste disposal contracts and wastewater discharge arrangements were discussed and verified.
	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	Maintenance areas feature impermeable surfaces and appropriate drainage. Pesticide mixing is conducted in designated areas with containment. Triple rinsing of containers is standard practice.
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	A register of hazardous substances is maintained and accessible to authorised staff. Fuel and chemical storage facilities meet legal standards, including bunded tanks, fire safety equipment, and emergency wash stations.

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)	The facility has a closed loop wash pad with a contract for Licensed Waste Contractor to periodically remove solids for legal disposal Washdown areas have oil separation and impermeable flooring. Staff demonstrated knowledge of correct procedures and monitoring systems.
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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 Appropriate grass species for the climate e.g., drought and disease tolerance	Irrigation is limited to essential playing surfaces, guided by turfgrass selection suited to low-input management. Course design and fine turf types reduce water demand across fairways and roughs.
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; Ensure effective application of water to target areas; Ensure irrigation schedules are informed by weather patterns and soil moisture levels	Irrigation system performance is regularly audited. Staff are trained in efficient water use, and application is informed by weather patterns and soil moisture readings. Sprinkler heads are calibrated and zones optimised for uniformity.

	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	Utility bills and consumption records are reviewed periodically. Water-saving measures, including low-flow fixtures and awareness-raising signage, are in place for staff and visitors.
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	The club holds a valid abstraction licence for irrigation. Records are maintained in compliance with regulatory requirements. Abstracted water is used judiciously, with monitoring to avoid overuse. The Club is reviewing alternative water sources and the potential for additional onsite water storage to improve water resilience. CIP: Please continue to review additional onsite storage and the potential to link this to habitat creation.
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	Areas of rough and out-of-play land have been removed from intensive management. Course layout supports reduced mowing frequency and inputs.
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	Electricity and fuel consumption are tracked through metering and utility records. Building systems and lighting have been reviewed for energy efficiency. Staff are aware of measures to reduce energy usage.

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	The club has reviewed options for on-site renewable energy, including solar PV and installed Solar Array on the Clubhouse and maintenance building roofs The declared PV generation indicates around 25% of electricity was renewable in 2023.
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	Materials purchasing is scrutinised to avoid unnecessary inputs. The team prioritises bulk ordering, reusable materials, and suppliers offering recycled products. Course materials like sand and soil are sourced locally.
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	The club demonstrates a preference for local and certified products, including FSC timber, organic fertilisers, and sustainable clothing. CCIP: Please formalise responsible purchasing into a wider sustainable procurement policy.
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	Clear signage and colour-coded bins are present across the facility. Recycling includes green waste, paper, plastics, and scrap metals. Staff track waste volumes and divert significant tonnage from landfill.
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	Waste contractors are authorised, and documentation discussed and reviewed.

			The club complies with local authority requirements, including safe handling of hazardous and industrial waste streams.
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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		Royal Birkdale offers occasional community access and has hosted events linked to regional interest groups. While primarily a private facility, there is some multifunctional use of spaces for community benefit.
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		The club supports local and national charities through fundraising golf days and donations. Staff and members are encouraged to participate in charitable initiatives, with several events held annually.
C1.3 Establish active community partnerships	C1.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups	Inform and include staff, members, and committees in sustainability efforts	There is ongoing engagement with local stakeholders, including conservation groups and local authorities. Sustainability efforts are communicated internally and externally, with staff and committees actively involved in environmental and social initiatives.

C2 Golfers & Employees			
C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities		The club recognises and promotes the health benefits of golf, encouraging regular play among members. While the course is not open to the public, membership includes opportunities for social and physical activity that support well-being.
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	Policies are in place to promote fairness and non-discrimination. Membership and visitor access procedures align with national guidelines on inclusivity. Discussions confirmed a welcoming culture and interest in broadening access where practical.
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	Employment practices follow UK legal standards, including health and safety protocols. A staff handbook and induction process are in place. Training logs and CPD activities confirm support for staff development and well-being.
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	Sustainability messages are shared via internal noticeboards and the club's website. On-course signage and ebulletins inform members about environmental actions, such as habitat conservation and water use efficiency.

	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	Royal Birkdale's reputation and profile are used to promote environmental stewardship through awards and certification participation. Some local partnerships are in place, and the club is open to future collaboration with schools and charities.
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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