GEO Certified® Report
Golfbaan Het Rijk van Margraten

Prepared by independent verifier Guido Hamelink

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2025
Recertification due: 2030

“The Rijk van Margraten golf course shows how sustainability can be embedded in daily practice. I was particularly impressed by the organizational continuity and the ongoing optimization over the years, as well as the recent collaboration with the municipality. The ambition to connect the Natura 2000 areas Bemelerberg & Schiepersberg and the Savelsbos is an inspiring theme that highlights the course’s role in strengthening the surrounding landscape.”

Guido Hamelink
(GEO accredited independent verifier)

Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Het Rijk van Margraten 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.

Het Rijk van Margraten 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, Het Rijk van Margraten should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Het Rijk van Margraten 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 – 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.isealalliance.org**

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**	General knowledge of the wildlife and habitats on the site	The Margraten Estate is situated between two Natura 2000 areas: Bemelerberg & Schiepersberg and the Savelsbos. The golf course is actively used as a foraging and habitat area by badgers and roe deer, and wild boar are regularly present. The most sensitive areas have been fenced off and are not accessible to golfers. During the construction of the golf course, and repeatedly thereafter, an ecologist was engaged to assess the ecological values and provide recommendations for improvements.
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Identify rare, protected or endangered species found on the golf course; Understand legal responsibilities for landscape protection and special area designations, if applicable	When carrying out management activities, an ecological work protocol is applied. This includes, for example, scheduling appropriate times for operations and conducting pre-inspections when trimming hedges and mowing roughs. A tree safety assessment was conducted in 2017 and again in 2020. **CCIP: Please update the ecological work protocol and tree safety plan in 2025 or 2026, carrying out administrative documentation of tree management as a safeguard for tree safety.**
	N1.1.3 Sound understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site, if applicable	The foundations of the Roman Villa Backerbosch are preserved underground, and the design of the clubhouse is inspired by this villa. From the course, there is a clear view of the adjacent mission house and its associated cultural-historical features. An information panel at hole 9 provides an explanation of the archaeological and cultural-historical values present on the site.
N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the golf course	**N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass**	Monitor patterns of play to identify underutilised areas of turfgrass	A base map of the golf course is available, showing that 14.65 ha of rough is present on the course. The area of natural grassland is limited to 1.1 ha of species-rich grassland.

				The main argument is the relatively small total area (approx. 52 ha) and the fertile topsoil, which—despite repeated mowing and removal—shows little reduction in productivity. In recent years, efforts have been made to optimize the rough areas; for instance, there are locations where mowing has been reduced. Overall, however, the total area of natural rough has remained more or less the same. **CIP: Around the clubhouse, there are still opportunities to expand the area of species-rich grassland.** **CIP: More importantly, attention should be given to improving the quality of the natural rough. At present, it is dominated by grasses and thistles, whereas there is potential for much greater diversity.**
	N1.3 Actively create and manage habitats for wildlife	**N1.3.1 Projects to create and manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf**	Prioritise native species of varying size and structure when planting Prioritise native trees and shrubs when planting Prioritise native aquatic species of varying size and structure when planting Establish mowing buffer zones next to water bodies and wetlands	As part of the *Poort van het Heuvelland* project, discussions are being held with, among others, Michel Heesen to assess additional opportunities to connect the two Natura 2000 areas. Nest boxes are being installed and monitored by the local bird working group. The group conducts bird counts in the surrounding area, but not on the golf course itself. However, they do share observations, such as a recent sighting of the little owl. **CIP: Please establish concrete targets for the development of nature values, such as habitat areas and target species.** **CIP: Please invite the local bird working group to carry out breeding bird monitoring on the golf course, so that more information becomes available to measure results.**
	N1.4 Conserve key species	**N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species**	Follow local best practice to protect or attract endangered, protected or rare species found on site	Based on the ecological work protocol, protected species are preserved. The trees in the orchard are gradually being replaced to ensure its long-term continuity. Sensitive habitats on the site have been fenced off.
	N2 Turfgrass			
	N2.1 Maintain optimum turfgrass and soil health	**N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and**	Select appropriate grass species for the climate	The target for the greens is 80% bentgrass, but the current situation is still quite far from this (around 50%). At Het Rijk, the aim is to achieve uniform quality across the golf courses, with a focus on bentgrasses.

		other geomorphological factors		However, this results in relatively higher fertilizer and water inputs compared to, for example, red fescue. Both Het Rijk and the SBA provide advice regarding the playing quality of the course. **CIP: Please discuss the possibility of switching to red fescue with the relevant advisors. This would require lower inputs (fertilization and water) and less intensive management. Document the various considerations in a report.**
		N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition	No specific international requirement, however, identify course management and agronomic activities and look for continual improvements	Considerable attention is given to mechanical maintenance (aeration, sanding, etc.). An annual plan is prepared for this and aligned with the golf course calendar.
		N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Test and monitor soil pH; Follow legal requirements when timing fertiliser applications Ensure staff are fully qualified to use fertilisers Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment Regularly calibrate and test applicators	Whereas the previous audit showed a strong reduction in fertilizer use on greens, tees, and fairways, we now see that levels have risen again (though not to their former levels). On the greens, nitrogen use decreased from 182 kg/ha in 2014 to 89 kg/ha, and then increased to 130 kg/ha in 2024. The greenkeeping team has a clear approach regarding quality assessment, the preparation of fertilization plans, and the application of fertilizers.
	N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Change hole locations frequently	The focus is on optimizing the baseline conditions: keeping the greens dry and using wetting agents to maintain sufficient moisture during drier periods. Major maintenance works are carried out thoroughly and quickly to minimize disruption, while at the same time safeguarding the long-term quality of the course.
	N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	Identify and track pest and disease hotspots, including sensitive areas Scout the course daily for early signs and symptoms Accurately diagnose to determine the cause of weeds, pests and diseases	Dollar spot pressure is relatively high; in the audit year 2025, symptoms were already present as early as May. The greenkeeping team remains vigilant for symptoms or signs of fungal diseases. In contact with other head greenkeepers, they also keep track of trends at other golf courses in the region. Preventive measures include rolling and the use of iron and sulfuric acid to limit the development of dollar spot as much as possible.

			When fungicides are applied, only the most susceptible greens are treated. Tapir is used as a herbicide on the fairways. **CIP: Please consider alternatives to pesticides in order to work towards a complete phase-out of their use.**
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use legally registered and approved products; Prefer products for the specific weed, pest or disease; Follow legal requirements; Ensure staff are fully qualified to use pesticides; Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of amenity turfgrass	Records are available of pesticides used and stored. The products are kept in a suitable, approved storage cabinet. Applications are carried out by greenkeepers holding a valid spraying license.
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 ; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer areas next to water bodies and wetlands; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer zones in and around ecologically sensitive areas	Buffer zones are maintained around the water features, where no fertilizers or pesticides are applied. Regular maintenance of machinery is carried out to prevent leaks.
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Formal wastewater discharge agreement, if applicable	A grease trap for capturing fats from catering wastewater is in place, along with records of its emptying by a certified waste processor. The condition of the system was recently inspected by an environmental agency and found to be in good order.

	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Wash machinery over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Mix and load pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	A petrol-oil grease separator for capturing wastewater is installed at the workshop, with records of its emptying by a certified waste processor available.
N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	**N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances**	List of hazardous substances, made available to authorised staff; Product and material data safety sheets; Well ventilated concrete or metal building; Impermeable, leak-free flooring; Sufficient storage capacity; Spill containment kits; Secondary containment e.g., bunds or drip trays; Emergency wash area, as per local requirements (body shower and / or eye wash station); Hazardous substances safely collected by a registered company or body ; Follow any additional legal requirements	An overview of hazardous substances and their locations is available. The pesticide storage cabinet and the diesel tank both comply with requirements. Oil is stored on spill trays.
	N3.2.2 Legal compliance in the storage and handling of fuels and gases	Tank secured to a horizontal, flat, non-combustible surface; Secondary containment of fuel in the event of spills e.g. bunds and drip trays; Inspection of storage tank(s) at least quarterly, if required; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area	An overview of hazardous substances and their storage locations is available. The pesticide storage cabinet and the diesel tank are compliant. Oil is stored on spill trays.

	N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	**N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage, treatment and discharge**	Impermeable, leak-free surface; Treatment as per local requirements (oil, grease and / or clipping separation; Formal discharge agreement, if applicable	The wash pad has been approved by an authorized body, and the inspection report has been uploaded to OnCourse.

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**	Select appropriate grass species for the climate e.g., drought and disease tolerance; Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces; Prioritise native, drought tolerant species for landscaping and planting	Document: Summary of Irrigation System Operation.
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	**R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course**	Schedule irrigation based on informed assessment of soil moisture and weather forecasts; Evaluate new irrigation technologies e.g., central control, precision sprinklers etc.; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices; Adjust sprinklers to playing surfaces only	The head greenkeeper monitors soil moisture levels. Due to a pump issue, the water meter did not provide accurate consumption data for some time. It is now functioning properly again and can be used to record volumes. An update of the irrigation system on the 18-hole championship course has significantly improved irrigation quality. The fairways, however, remain without irrigation. **CIP: Please develop a plan for how the golf course can become independent of groundwater use. Explore opportunities for water storage that would enable self-sufficiency.**
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Monitor and record water consumption (bills, flow meter etc.); Encourage water conservation practices amongst players and staff	All replacement investments are focused on sustainability and on reducing water consumption. Water use in the clubhouse has remained stable in recent years.

R1.3 Source water responsibly	**R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water**	Water abstraction permit, if required; Report water consumption to environment agency, if required	
R2 Energy			
R2.1 Reduce energy demand	**R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in golf course maintenance**	Naturalise non-playing areas to reduce mowing and other energy intensive inputs	Reducing fossil fuel consumption in greenkeeping is part of the machinery replacement program. The majority of equipment has now been electrified. An electric mower deck for the fairways is currently being tested. The buggies have been converted from conventional batteries to lithium batteries, making them more energy-efficient and far less prone to malfunctions.
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	**R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings**	Monitor and record energy consumption (bills, meters etc.)	In recent years, the installer has replaced the lighting with LED and can remotely adjust certain settings for underfloor heating and energy schedules.
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	**R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy**	Understand the energy mix of your electricity supplier; Explore possible greener energy providers	Solar panels have been installed on the driving range and are now in operation.
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**	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to reduce the demand for materials and look for continual improvements	Purchasing is done through a wholesaler, with attention given to seasonal products and typical local specialties. In addition, the partner network of Het Rijk van Margraten is used to engage local suppliers.
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	**R3.2.1 Commit to sustainable purchasing practices**	Favour responsible, lower impact products	Glass, paper/cardboard, grass, and residual waste are collected separately. In recent years, plastic has been added as a separate waste stream. This has resulted in more than 50% of the waste being reused instead of incinerated. **CIP**: **Please investigate the possibility of collecting food waste (swill).**

R3.3 Reuse and recycle	**R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity**	Put in place a recycling separation system, according to local rules and availability; Clear, simple and visible bin signage; Monitor and record weight of waste for each stream e.g. invoices, bills etc.	Waste is demonstrably collected by a certified waste management company. The presence of underground containers helps minimize the number of transport movements.
R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	**R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations**	Authorised waste collector for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste, if required	Grass clippings are collected separately and removed.

COMMUNITY

C1 Health & Wellbeing

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Improve health and wellbeing	**C1.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities**	Plans in place to respond to incidents and emergencies	Risk management is set out in a plan (*Occupational Health & Safety Policy and Risk Inventory & Evaluation 2024*). Several actions need to be implemented in the coming period, including an update of the RI&E in 2027. The clubhouse is easily accessible for people with disabilities: it is on one level and includes a disabled toilet. For those with reduced mobility, 14 buggies are available, allowing them to continue playing golf in this hilly landscape for many years.
C1.2 Be open and inclusive	**C1.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies**	Membership policies free from discrimination across age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnic background	Active efforts are made to diversify age groups. For the junior members, the manager would preferably see the establishment of a youth committee, although this responsibility lies with the golf club. A characteristic feature is the engagement of student members, fitting for the university city of Maastricht. For the 25–40 age group, a new membership tariff has been introduced

			(across all Het Rijk courses) to strengthen retention within this demographic.
C1.3 Employ fairly, safely and provide career opportunities	**C1.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development**	Adopt an equal opportunity recruitment and hiring policy; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for hiring and employment; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for worker safety	Golf Course Het Rijk van Margraten provides opportunities for employment and reintegration placements for people with a distance to the labor market. For example, Ukrainians have been employed in hospitality services and in supporting the greenkeeping team.
C2 Outreach & Inclusion			
C2.1 Diversify access and provide multifunctionality	**C2.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility**	No specific international requirement, however, identify multifunctional activities and look for continual improvements	The clubhouse is accessible to recreational visitors from the surrounding area, and this is actively encouraged. A public footpath crosses the golf course, contributing to the inflow of recreational visitors.
C2.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	**C2.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes**	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to support volunteering and charity and look for continual improvements	A competition was held to raise money for the Ronald McDonald's Fund. An Old Grandad's Swap Market was also organised to give golf equipment a second life and raise money for charity.
C2.3 Establish active community partnerships	**C2.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups**	No specific international requirement, however, identify partnerships and community activities and look for continual improvements	In recent years, the Margraten government has increasingly sought contact with local governments. It has also maintained contact with its neighboring landowners, such as the local bird working group and the IKL (Institute for the Protection of Birds), as well as regional businesses that have established loyalty programs for their employees.
C3 Communications & Advocacy			
C3.1 Engage staff and golfers	**C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors**	Involve staff and committees in sustainability efforts; Involve golfers in sustainability efforts;	Sustainability is one of the themes on which management reports and on which agreements are made within the organization (from waste collection to track maintenance). In addition, there is the Cittaslow initiative in which they participate to draw attention to local, sustainable initiatives.

			Post sustainability information in the clubhouse and / or on the golf course	
	C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	**C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community**	Share at least 3 Highlights on sustainable.golf	Contact with local authorities and organizations has led to greater awareness of the golf course and the sustainability initiatives being taken there.
	C3.3 Follow a journey of continuous improvement	**C3.3.1 Measures to help track, review and improve sustainability and climate action**	Put measures in place to ensure that OnCourse can be updated annually	Periodic reports are submitted to the management of the National Golf Courses Agency (Het Rijk Golf Courses) on various topics (course maintenance, waste, and water). This is also the third GEO audit conducted on the course.

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