



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report Golfclub Houtrak

Prepared by Independent Verifier, Adrie van der Werf

Certified by GEO Foundation: October 2020
Valid until: October 2025

“Golfclub Houtrak has been in a transition phase with 2020 marking several new operational initiatives. Over the years the club has shown that they endorse sustainability and act accordingly. As approximately 35 ha consists woodland, open water and shrub vegetation the course functions as an ecological stepping-stone in this semi-urban location, and the club and the greenkeeping team are proud to maintain this important function. During my discussions with the GEO commission it became clear that the club continues trying to improve itself with many sustainability issues and the next period will be very interesting in terms of new activities and approaches to management.”

Adrie van der Werf

GEO accredited Independent Verifier



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Golfclub Houtrak 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.

Golfclub Houtrak 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 set for the future, Golfclub Houtrak should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Golfclub Houtrak 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

Richard Allison
Manager, GEO Certified Facilities



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	Houtrak is well aware of vegetation types present on their course, and flora and fauna (birds) are surveyed every three years by an external specialist. During the last bird survey more than 140 species were recorded of which roughly 25% are protected according to law. Their course management actions are well

			documented (2010-2020), and an updated version will come into action by 2020. The course management team is well aware of tree species present on the course and larger and smaller bush areas are scanned and maintained regularly year-round. Recently, the club has commissioned a Visual Tree Assessment and Ecological Work Protocol.
	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	See N1.1.1 The new contractor is certified and both the club and the contractor are aware of the “Wet Natuurbescherming” and act according to it.
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	No archaeological, historical or cultural designation are present (or known) on the course.
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	According to the GEO commission, the club regularly consulted golfers about their experience with respect to the “look and feel” of the course. Based on these observations and on expert knowledge, a well-balanced course has been achieved over the last years, with lots of opportunities for nature development.
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	Action plans are properly described and maintenance of the forest/bush areas is targeted towards a natural look and feel, with special attention on preservation of healthy native tree species.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		See N1.3
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	During our discussion, the head greenkeeper mentioned that for re-seeding of greens, tees and fairways only appropriate varieties of Festuca, Agrostis and Lolium are used.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		Standard procedures were used until now. The new head greenkeeper will come up with alternatives especially for the greens, as rooting depth is not preferential at the moment. Furthermore, maintenance will be targeted towards a reduction of

			Poa annua abundance.	
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	Goals and practises were described properly in their old management plan. With a new contractor in action, an updated version has been implemented. Special attention will be given to a further reduction of the rate of N, P, K fertilization. Both N&P fertilization was reduced over the last 10 years significantly by more than 40%. Fairways are not fertilized at all.	
	N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	Standard procedures like sharpening mowing blades etc are in action to reduce pesticide use as much as possible. Around greens a tree management plan has come into action to allow more sunlight to the surfaces.
	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	The greenkeeping team regularly scouts for early signs of diseases and pesticides are used only when necessary and based on expert knowledge
		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 use of pesticides is administrated, i.e. type, rates and areas sprayed. Only licensed persons are allowed to use chemicals, and only permitted chemicals are used and stored according to legislation.
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.	Handling of chemicals is according to legislation. Buffer zones are maintained around all water bodies and nature areas. The GEO commission, together with the new contractor is now working on an action plan with respect to soil contamination.	
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure	Ensure all hazardous materials are safely and securely stored;	See 3.1.1	

	pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Ensure compliance with all required standards and systems for hazardous waste and wastewater discharge	All waste is treated according to legislation and collected by certified contractors
	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	Recently a new and certified washing area with a leak free impermeable surface was installed. Oil/grease separator is regularly checked and wastewater is discharged to the main sewer.
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	See above All chemicals and fuels are stored according to legislation
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)	See above

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	Only greens and tees irrigated, fairways only in the case of extreme hot summers, like that of 2018/2019.
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 analysis	Soil moisture analyses are performed for greens and tees. With respect to new irrigation schemes, the club is now in discussion with the new contractor. Old poorly functioning sprinkler heads will be replaced.
	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	In general, Houtrak will from 2020 onwards address all sustainability issues, including water use, more regularly via meetings and a digital GEO-newsletter.
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	n/a

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	See above, according to GEO commission a healthy balance between playing and non-playing areas has been achieved by now. Use of hybrid machines is now under discussion with the contractor.
R2.2 Maximise energy	R2.2.1 Measures to use	Audit energy use regularly;	Like many other golf clubs in The Netherlands, energy use in the

efficiency	energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	Regularly review bills; Categorise and track energy consumption	clubhouse is a hot topic within the GEO commission of Houtrak. An energy audit in 2018 by an internal expert (member) has resulted in a gradual replacement of conventional lighting to LED. Nowadays > 80% consists out of LED lighting. Also, the kitchen was renovated recently, and traditional gas cooking has been replaced by electric cooking. Furthermore, the installation of solar panels is now being discussed with the board.
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	See above
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	Recently several new drinking water tap points were installed to refill bottles and so reducing unnecessary excessive use of small plastic bottles. Discussions with respect to garbage bins in the course are ongoing. When communicated properly, removal of garbage bins in the course and installation of larger garbage bins near and around the clubhouse would offer a great opportunity to further separate waste.
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	Houtrak is in a transition phase. i.e. a new maintenance contractor (2019), a new restaurant contractor (2020) and a new board. Together with the GEO committee a formal purchasing policy will be adopted.
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	See above; all waste is collected by certified contractors, e.g. used cooking oils are collected and recycled into new energy sources again.
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	See 3.2. Together with the new contractor, the GEO commission has analysed new better ways to store biomass, which has come into action this year.

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		n/a
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		Several charity activities are being organized, but at the moment this has a low priority (see next point)
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 sustainability working group will be formally installed by 2020. In a 3-page memorandum key issues with respect to sustainability have been described, from course maintenance to finally communication and collaboration with local nature organizations

C2 Golfers & Employees

C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities		
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	All aspects relating to diversity and in membership etc are described in the internal regulations of Golfclub Houtrak
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	Ongoing, relevant courses are offered for staff.

C3 Communications

C3.1 Engage golfers and members	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness	Provide information on the facility's sustainability commitments, actions,	In action from 2020 onwards (see above)
---------------------------------	---	--	---

		and understanding amongst members and visitors	or achievements	
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	In action from 2020 onwards (see above)	

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