

GEO Certified® Independent Verification Report



Golf Facility: Aldwickbury Park Golf Club
Prepared by: Tony Hanson
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Executive Summary

Aldwickbury Park Golf Club is situated on the estate of Aldwick Manor, which dates back to the 14th Century, and currently covers an area of approximately 43 hectares. Situated between Harpenden and Wheathampstead, the estate is bounded by the River Lea to the North, roads to the south and east, and residential development to the North West.

The bedrock across the site is chalk and chalkstone, with boulder clays and chalky flint outcrops, and levels falling approximately 150 feet from the clubhouse down to the valley floor and the River Lea.

The surrounding landscape reflects the historic agricultural land use with a combination of fields, hedgerows and woodland areas providing a natural buffer separating older communities and new towns developed in the 1950's.

The course was designed and built in the mid 1990's and has been operated by Burhill Golf and Leisure from the start. Although the site was previously agricultural, it benefits from several areas of mature deciduous woodland that have been incorporated in to the design providing definition to fairways, and challenges to the unwary golfer. Combine this with the intelligent use of level changes and you have challenges primarily governed by the need for accuracy rather than power.

The clubhouse extension continues to provide a local hub for business meetings and conferences, as well as a popular venue for weddings. The extension benefits from a range of modern technology integrated in to the design and construction to ensure ongoing operational efficiency.

Nature

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The course occupies a site of approximately 43 hectares with 22 hectares in play. The site provides a range of habitats including grassland, scrub, hedgerows, woodland and wetland.

The site is not subject to any statutory land designations, however it is noted as important under the RSPB Bird Conservation Targeting Project for a range of species including; Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*), Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*), Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*) and Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). The age of the estate results in areas of woodland being noted on the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees Register and also a Deciduous Woodland BAP habitat.

Due to the sympathetic management style, and open discussions between the Local Authority and the facility, it is not considered expedient to provide any legal protection for the site in the form of Tree Preservation Orders. The majority of trees on site are self set and including Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Oak (*Quercus robur*), specimen Copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica* cv. *Purpurea*) and even a Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) resulting from the estates previous owner.

The course is in an area still noted as nitrate vulnerable for both surface and ground water partly due to the geology, agricultural use of the surrounding area, and proximity of the River Lea.

Management has been implementing a range of projects to help both improve biodiversity and to provide for future needs and succession. Grassland expansion, nesting boxes, tree planting, and wetland have all been delivered.

The development of the substantial wildflower meadows in a number of locations across the site provides excellent habitat for a range of wildlife, a fantastic use of rough stony soil that is of no use for golf. The ongoing thinning of the woodland under-storey has resulted in greater airflows to playing surfaces and a profusion of growth from the existing seed bank, most notably bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

Over the next 3 years the club will continue to monitor the area of close mown amenity grassland with a view to maximising the more naturalised areas of the site.

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The club is also keen to encourage members to record sightings of flora and fauna on course and to expand engagement with The Wildlife Trust to identify possible collaboration on national and local projects.

The management of veteran trees, allowing a managed decline and standing deadwood, has resulted in the creation of excellent habitat for a range of birds, insects and mammals. In conjunction with the wildflower creation projects to encourage pollinators, and member engagement in planting wildflower areas in their gardens, shows a balance between course and habitat can be achieved.

The choice and mix of turf grass species is the result of a combination of naturally establishing Annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) and the over-seeding with Red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), which aim for the required wear tolerance and reduced need for nutrients.

The management system continues to be based on review and the assessment of need. Inputs are minimised, and preventative action taken based on 10 plus years of documented records of weather conditions and resulting turf requirements. Greens staff are continuing these detailed records and storing the data to help and improve future management.

Chemicals are stored in a bunded store-room within the maintenance building incorporating a self-contained drainage pound to capture spillage. Spill kits are easily accessible, as are washing and first aid facilities in the event of a staff members being affected by a spillage.

Fuels and oils are similarly stored in bunded tanks, and the wash-down area drains to a self-contained drainage system which has recently been installed.

Full records are maintained including deliveries, stocks held that include when staff access stocks and how they use any fuel oils, or chemicals, to ensure detailed management and staff awareness. Ongoing use and spill training is provided annually.

Chemicals are stored in a bunded store-room within the maintenance building incorporating self-contained drainage to capture potential spillage. Spill kits are easily accessible, as are
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washing and first aid facilities in the event of a staff members being affected by a spillage.



Fuels and oils are similarly stored in bunded tanks, and the wash-down area drains to a self-contained drainage system.

Full records are maintained including deliveries, stocks held and use to help identify any slow leaks or excessive use on site.

Resources

Aldwickbury Park Golf Club uses potable mains supply and sewerage for both the clubhouse and maintenance areas.

The irrigation for the course is supplied exclusively from the reservoir, and consumption varies with rainfall totals and need.

The irrigation system is maintained and serviced regularly and sprinklers and pipework checked to ensure targeted and efficient delivery. Further upgrades of the system were expected within the current certification cycle, however the project has been slightly delayed with the upgrades expected in the next 6 to 12 months (2017-'18).

The extension to the clubhouse has underlined the desire to use the most efficient fixtures and fittings, and a wider programme of efficiency upgrades has been undertaken.

The club has also implemented a successful awareness campaign to encourage stakeholders to consider water and energy use and to minimise consumption.

The club has continued to expand stakeholder engagement and awareness of energy and water consumption over the last three years, particularly among members and players.

There is also a review of the irrigation pipework which may lead to an upgrade as part of the planned capital investment project for the next certification cycle.

The club uses mains grid electricity and mains natural gas for lighting, cooling and heating across the estate.

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Following the clubhouse extension significant work has been undertaken on the original sections on the clubhouse including insulation, LED lighting, kitchen refurbishment including new “A” rated appliances and the latest heating controls.

Awareness is still high on the agenda with staff and members encouraged to reduce use and turnoff where they can. Timers and sensors have been deployed in carpark and low occupancy areas.

The club operates as part of a group with 9 other sites, which have a number of centralised supply contracts with national suppliers. As part of the overarching ethical purchasing policy, Aldwickbury Park work with local suppliers where possible. Primarily local suppliers are used for fresh produce within catering functions and for servicing and maintenance for plant and equipment.

Separation of waste streams and recycling are standard operational practice across all areas of the business, and although there have not been any formal waste audits, the management are still working to reduce waste to landfill.

The club has a contract with a licensed waste contractor to collect a process hazardous waste and used containers.

Community

Aldwickbury Park Golf Centre remains a popular local facility providing a challenging 18 hole course, excellent short course and superb clubhouse and is clearly enjoyed by the entire community. Facilities have been expanded to meet demand from local groups and private functions.

Beginners lessons, kids golf and wider use of the facilities continue to be encouraged including local schools who use the site for meetings and events. The facilities at the club include the Manor short course, introducing new players to the sport, and non-golfers are welcomed to the clubhouse facilities.

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Continued engagement with the Wildlife Trust will hopefully result in specific projects on the course to help engage members/players and wider community in the coming months and years.



Conclusion

I, Anthony Hanson, independent accredited verifier, recommend Aldwickbury Park Golf Club to be awarded the GEO Certified® ecolabel because of the continuing efforts being made by club staff and management, notably: Veteran tree – managed decline allowing standing deadwood habitat creation for a range of birds, insects and mammals; Wildflower creation to encourage pollinators, and member engagement in the wildflower initiative by encouraging planting in their gardens at home.

Stakeholder time and effort is spent on built and natural environments in an effort to improve sustainability and enhance biodiversity on site. The result is an enhanced team spirit, reduced operational costs and increased natural capital.

I look forward to seeing the progress over the next cycle, including planned improvement actions such as: Monitoring of the area of close mown amenity grassland with a view to maximising the more naturalised areas of the site; Encouraging members to record sightings of flora and fauna on course; Expanding engagement with The Wildlife Trust to identify possible collaboration on national / local projects and communications opportunities; Expanding stakeholder engagement and awareness of energy and water consumption among members and players; Review of the irrigation pipework as a possible capital investment project for the next certification cycle.