



GEO Certified[®]

GEO Certified[®] Report Dundonald Links

Prepared by Independent Verifier, Bob Taylor

Certified by GEO Foundation: December 2019
Valid until: December 2024



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Dundonald 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.

Dundonald 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 set for the future, Dundonald Links should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Dundonald 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

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.isealalliance.org



Verifier's Report

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

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Habitats & Biodiversity• Turfgrass management• Pollution prevention
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water• Energy• Materials
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships & Outreach• Golfing & Employment• Advocacy & Communications

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

Executive Summary

This is the 3rd verification undertaken on behalf of GEO Foundation and in support of Dundonald Links. Over the last 6 years since the first verification (December 2013), Dundonald Links has largely led the way in sustainable working.

The golf club as a whole is operated by a dedicated and enthused team all understanding their roles and their own connectivity within the club and how these come together to ensure an overall integrated sustainable management approach

All of the staff at Dundonald have their own targeted responsibilities and recognise the club's laid out policy objectives on sustainability. Together each section contributes and ensures delivery of the club's sustainability drive. All staff joining the club have been inducted with sustainability very much at the forefront of all management and working operations. The club too has always been proactive agreeing to work to ensure sustainability is captured in all working areas. This has benefitted the club in so many ways. Working in this way has put Dundonald well and truly on the map. Most clubs through GB have heard of Dundonald, many can only aspire to achieve similar levels of progress.

Dundonald Links has hosted The Ladies Scottish Open and The Scottish Open since the last GEO verification. It was positive to see that practical sustainable everyday working was up scaled to tournament level. A significant element of the drive of the club was to ensure suitable site protection. This was enabled by consultancy walkovers detailing areas of ecological sensitivities and site protection requirements during the set up and the operational phases. The visit allowed for fine tuning recommendations as required to ensure ongoing protection for the surrounding environment, the wildlife and the principal habitat areas.

Recognition over the last 6 years has come from several sources including Golf Tourism Scotland, Ayrshire Business Awards, BIGGA, IAGTO and through the Golf Environment Awards. This as a whole has served to massively raise the profile of the club not just within the golfing industry, but with external tour operators, Scottish Golf and golfs governing body, The R&A.

Individual golf clubs throughout the UK seek advice from the club regarding start up to progression of sustainable management in all its guises.

Even though the club is now entering its third successive period of GEO Foundation accreditation they still find opportunities for ongoing improvement:

Nature

The golf course does not support any protected site status, but it does lie adjacent to the Gales Marsh Nature Reserve run by Scottish Wildlife Trust. The golf course importantly gives connectivity to the nature reserve reducing its otherwise isolated island position. Importantly the club is in regular liaison with Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Golf Environment Group, Scottish Natural Heritage RSPB, Butterfly Conservation and Bug-life seeking advice on managing not only the course but the landscape character that makes up the course and the adjacent protected sites.

Environmental interests are informed by the meetings the club holds with Carbon Trust Energy Savings Trust, Resource Efficiency Scotland and Zero Waste Scotland. The club indeed are part of a Scottish Action Group assisting in auditing and informing staff training.

The principal habitats making up the site, extend to over 60ha, these include the extensive acid grassland and the associated Atlantic coastal heath, The sand dunes, wetlands and marsh. Scattered scrub and a few blocks of plantation woodland are also represented.

The club recognises the importance of the habitats represented on the course and indeed the species that are likely to be found. Over the years data of the main species taxa have been documented using school children and local naturalists. A small field centre was created on the course specifically as an education and study centre. The facility has led to the provision of quiet comprehensive species listings. The sustainability coordinator at Dundonald has responsibility for the compilation and actioning of the various management plans including the Wetland Action Plan and also for generating media for member interest. An Environmental Management plan covering 2018 to 2023 covers the club and its working through all areas. This document sets the strategic vision and objectives for management.

An important aspect at this club is the emphasis given to understanding the landscape into which the golf course sits. Habitat condition monitoring is undertaken annually by the club.

Given the recognition of the importance of the site for wildlife, Dundonald GC sourced outside expertise at the time of the 2017 Scottish Open to identify ecological hotspots and ensure that protection was provided. This was actioned to ensure their conservation objectives where being met, rather than being requested by any outside bodies.

The site extends to over 114 ha. 25 ha is classed as predominantly amenity turf or areas managed for the playing of the game. Turfgrass composition although variable over the site is largely composed of the more drought tolerant fine grass species including *Festuca rubra*, *Agrostis* sp. and *Poa annua*. Surface conditions over the course are managed to a very good standard and in the main are consistent.

The club have adopted a pest disease tolerance matrix which ensure cultural and physical means of management and control before chemical resources are used. In addition, a significant effort by the club is given to education. It is important here to note that pesticides use has halved in the last 3 years. Since the last verification review Dundonald have introduced a reed bed filtration system with large work pad to capture and safely dispose of waste waters arising from the washing down of the maintenance equipment. Product and materials storage were up to date, well sign-posted and with very clean surround work areas.

A chemical spill plan is in place and is adopted by all staff. The plan covers all areas of working.

Dundonald Links remain aware of the need for constant testing of inputs and outputs. Daily visual checks are carried out within the water courses and periodic testing is undertaken as required.

Resources

The club relies on a mix of slightly saline ground water from a bore hole source diluted with mains water. The average consumption remains consistent at around 5 million litres per annum. The amount is dependent upon annual rainfall figures. Water management, determined using soil moisture probes, has reduced slightly from 2013. This has been made possible using an integrated approach of data collation (particularly rainfall and soil moisture data *collation*) together with physical on course practices including aeration and the on-going use of wetting agents all tied in with the establishment of more drought tolerant grass species.

Course irrigation is controlled by a fully computerised irrigation system incorporating individual head control on the greens (2 heads on fairways) a portable handheld controller and variable frequency drive pumping system allows water to be used in the most efficient and effective way reducing both water and energy consumption. Over 500 heads are controlled in this way.

The system is serviced on an annual basis to prevent leaks and to maintain efficiency of working.

Several water saving measures have been practiced within the clubhouse including low flow urinals, use of efficient shower technology and constant monitoring to ensure maintenance to a high level.

Over the last few years water auditing has been undertaken. Water conservation and pollution prevention practices have been documented and are now operational. Dundonald will continue developing the water saving and use objectives through the clubhouse development proposals.

Electricity and gas use are monitored and have reduced over the two terms of certification (by 5% from 2012 to 2019). A further 5% drop is anticipated over the course of 2019 to 2020. This has been achieved through cost effective purchasing and use

Over the next few years with the clubhouse design levels will alter but the club understand use and regulation and will ensure that all energy and waste saving opportunities that are normally and reasonably expected are accommodated with in the clubhouse design and build. The club are continuing to monitor existing practices whilst looking to improve further in all areas of energy management.

Given all of the above it should be possible to secure a further 5% drop in energy use given clubhouse efficiencies and by understanding use

This club is an ambassador to others in terms of understanding, and procurement of energy conservation.

The club excels at waste management. A number of initiatives, including reductions in use of plastic cups in the staff water coolers and routine housekeeping is all leading to massive energy savings whilst reducing the carbon footprint and waste costs. Routine best practice working towards energy is well covered within the club's application.

Waste is an area where Dundonald Links are extremely strong, waste management is in place through all areas of working. The club in its entirety work to an agreed Waste Management Appraisal System in which all staff are included. The appraisal covers an agreed holistic approach on waste through to encouraging ownership. Issues also address pollution avoidance and legal compliance.

This club advocates best proactive working and adopts it. Monitoring of practices is reviewed via meetings of all heads of department on a three-monthly basis. At these meetings working practices are reviewed and responsibilities are assigned.

This club leads the golfing sector in terms of their comprehensive waste strategies across all areas of their working. The waste management at Dundonald brings considerable annual savings.

Formal waste audits are completed annually which helps retain awareness of legislation and legislative compliance as well as providing opportunities for further improvement.

The club are proud that they operated the last 3 Ladies Scottish Open and Scottish Open as zero waste events. Those events were first on the Ladies European Tour and European Tour events to achieve, zero to waste, demonstrating that sporting events can be at the fore front of sustainable management. Dundonald Links should be highly commended for leading the way and inspiring others to follow suit.

One of the highlights from the waste management of those events was the club worked hard against considerable odds to ensure food and beverage not used during the events was directed to a local food bank. Local wildlife charity volunteers also benefited from food and beverage parcels.

Community

This is another area in which the club excels. I mentioned the relationship the club has with SNH, SWT and others including RSPB & The R&A. They also engage with the public, local schools, local naturalists and associated groups. And have become known as a resource from which others can learn and develop. The club has erected notice boards for staff to communicate features of interest to players Notice boards on the tees describe the wildlife interests to be found on the course. The greenstaff are active in promoting the sustainability side of their working which includes advising the whole club. Media contributions are often noted in various forms including Bunkered, BIGGA International, Golf Monthly, GCMA and Golf Club Management Magazine. SGEF, Zero Waste Scotland, William Tracey, The R&A has produced a number of case studies regarding the club's approach to sustainable golf. Two staff are active BIGGA Board Members and are responsible for delivering education to the wider industry.

Over the last few years the club has engaged with local schools to deliver on site golf participation and outdoor learning. In 2011 received around 40 school children. This has grown massively as in 2019 Dundonald Links have received over 1100 school children.

Conclusion

It is impossible not to be moved by the holistic and proactive manner in which sustainability in all its guises is embraced by Dundonald Links. The motivation of the club is entirely driven by the group aspiration and vision that is getting stronger and stronger throughout. If any golf club deserves GEO certification then it is Dundonald Links. Moreover it is a club that should be used to demonstrate the application that many other clubs have yet to consider.

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