



GEO Certified[®]

GEO Certified[®] Report Golfclub De Palingbeek

Prepared by independent verifier, Valentine Godin

Certified by GEO Foundation: December 2022
Valid until: December 2025

GEO Certified[®]

 **GEO
Foundation**
Sustainability in and through golf

'A sanctuary for biodiversity and an inspiring example demonstrating how golf courses can form an integrative part of the natural landscape. Driven by a team of passionate individuals, Palingbeek Golfclub continues to demonstrate high standards across all fronts of sustainable management and its commitment to conserving nature has never been stronger. Investing in renewable energy, water efficiency and new protected areas for the local flora and fauna, best practices are demonstrated at each level of management. I very much look forward to following their progress and wish them the best of luck in future endeavours!'

Valentine Godin

(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that **Golfclub De Palingbeek** 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 De Palingbeek 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, **Golfclub De Palingbeek** should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, **Golfclub De Palingbeek** 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.

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	Completely new site management plan has been developed with local NGOs and authorities to ensure best management practices in the various habitats present at the site. Entire land mapped and habitats referenced, management written plan and report seen by verifier.

			Flora and fauna surveys continues to be logged in the website surveys on https://waarnemingen.be/locations/32178/ There are now over 11000 observations registered documenting local fauna and flora. Amongst other initiatives, orchid conservation projects continue to be implemented with impressive results.
	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	<i>Efforts continue to be made, sinus management, orchid protection programs and initiative to protect salamanders all continue to be animated and were observed on-site. New initiatives protecting local deer amongst other small grazing species. All efforts and land management requirements formalized and outlined in new site management plan which was drafted with local authorities and relevant nature NGOs. Annual audit ensuring all management practices are followed are performed by the involved parties annually.</i>
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	Initiatives continue to be taken by the region to commemorate the site. Trees planted on the course in remembrance of the front lines as well as information board raising awareness on the historical importance of the site. Awareness of the site historical importance is also given by the team and good relationship with local authorities. New site development for a new 9 holes is under planning. Digging to protect historical treasures is planned prior to the course construction and any land movement.
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	High natural rough still exist around the course and were accepted by visitors and members. Fairway made smaller reducing the play areas by 2ha. New water bodies created on-site encouraging the site's water autonomy as well protecting local fauna.
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	Brand new site management plan in place with clear guidance and requirements for each site habitat. Focus continues to be made on conserving dead wood, host plant and combat invasive species (eg: American Oak)
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		All detailed in management plan.
N2 Turfgrass			
	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties	Select appropriate grass species for climate	Increased efforts made on overseeding and carefully selecting grass with high drought tolerance and disease tolerance given the increased focus

N2.1 Maintain optimum turf and soil health	adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors		of the course on low pesticide input management. Fertilisation and moisture content continue to be monitored as well as increased focus has been put on soil analysis monitoring pH with a set target (lower average). New lower target pH met in effort to better control disease incidence. Soil analysis shown and shared with verifier.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		Soil analysis made regularly (annually). A focus on lowering the soil pH has been the strategy. pH successfully lowered from averages around 7.5 to averages around 6.5 in the last 3 years.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	All data continue to be recorded annually. Soil tests made annually and good monitoring of the soil health and nutrient content.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	Best practices continue to be followed.
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	Increased focus from greenkeeper to avoid all form of pesticides. Fungicides no longer in use (last application September 2020) Spot spraying of pesticides and spot spraying of one herbicide once a year continues to limit dandelions and white clover. Herbicide applications are push back during the season as long as possible to ensure food sustenance of local fauna and minimise negative impact on nature. No blanket spraying on site for over 3 years.
	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	Inadequate products disposed of. Sprayers still checked and appropriate maintenance completed. Blanket spraying has stopped. Only hand spot-spraying taking place on greens, tees and fairways. Some strong herbicides also used locally at times on parking to limit weeds.
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are	Document procedures for emergency spill responses;	Emergency spill response plan written and uploaded on OnCourse.

	minimised from golf course operations	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.	
	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	Catering still outsourced. Contractor changed every year since last certification, club has understandably found it difficult to find the right match. New contractor since October – seems positive relationship being put in place at the moment with many new initiatives and ideas for improvements. Effort towards composting, minimizing waste, water and energy use will be discuss in the coming months and objectives defined. Desire to ensure sustainable approach to catering mentioned and will be discussed with contractors in the coming months. CIP: Consider transition towards plastic-free catering, composting of food waste in the already existing on-site compost, ensure seasonal menus amongst other things.
	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	Workshops cleaned, tidy and well-maintained.
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	Storage of oils, fat and pesticides stored appropriately. Oil barrels stand on grills, fire extinguishers checked. Pesticide and paint in fire-safe cabinet.

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)	Oil / grease separator then discharged to surface water. Water runoff from green waste compost however isolated and stored in tank then used during summer to complement fertilization / irrigation.
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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	Confirmed.
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	TDR soil moisture sensor continues to be used. Annual allowances of 11000m3 still in place. Strong water awareness from the greenkeeper to manage water efficiently. Hand watering and green-only irrigation is preferred during drought period. New irrigation system being installed in the 3 coming years modernizing entire system. Sprinklers on tees have been re-organised from center irrigation to side irrigation increasing efficiency and lowering waste/ water usage. Readings taken on irrigation reservoir level and on the flow meter weekly. Records shown.
	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	Press button on tap continues to exist with improvements as renovation are carried out. Upstairs bathroom closed encouraging members and visitors to use driving range facilities which use rainwater for water supply. Water usage agreement with new catering contractor will be looked into in the near future.
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	Compliance with local restrictions. Water permit seen and water meter readings seen.

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	<p>2ha of fairways have been removed lowering mowing and turf inputs.</p> <p>Total fuel consumption (diesel, fuel and essence) lowered by 15%. 2022 data should be observed to confirm lowering. Decreased areas of maintained grass with fairways reduction of 2ha and purchase of more energy efficient machinery should support the trend. Total non-renewables energy decreased by over 30% in three years.</p> <p>Heating thermostats lowered by 4 degree (24 to 20) saving cost and saving energy.</p>
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	<p>Electricity used lowered by a factor of 2 thanks the newly installed solar panels on the driving range.</p> <p>New full-time staff looking after the club's infrastructure. Amongst other things, focus on energy management. New energy management system installed in the clubhouse monitoring energy usage and identifying energy intensive devices. Fridges identified as large source of energy use. New fridge bought, expected saving of cutting energy by 5.</p> <p>All lights in the process of being switch to LEDs. New more energy-efficient machines have been bought including new mowers cutting costs and limited fuel consumption.</p> <p>CIP: Continue transition to renewable energy with the installation of additional solar panels to be installed on future renovated greenkeeping shed. Follow through project of switching all lights to LEDs.</p>
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	Solar panels installed making a significant difference at the club.
R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled,	Undertake a review of materials consumed	<p>Not much change although has not been prioritised given instability in contractor.</p> <p>CIP:</p>

	reused and locally sourced alternatives		Implement club wide sustainable purchasing policy.
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	New purchasing policy still in development while business relationships form. CIP: New purchasing policy finalized and published. Increase engagement with suppliers to ensure best practices on their end.
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	Green composting continues to be present on site. PMC, carton / paper and glass recycled and handled correctly. Food waste at the restaurant at the moment not dealt with. CIP: Implement best practices to minimise food waste and develop sustainable waste stream for food waste from the catering facilities (eg: composting).
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	Confirmed.

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		All paths still in existence. Links with local community reinforced.

C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		
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'	New nature committee created with local authorities and nature NGOs involved in the site management plan. Regular meetings and follow up on progress and projects developments.
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	Diversity and all-inclusive members and visitors policies is promoted across the facilities. No restrictions on backgrounds, ethnicity, genders, religious affiliation etc is imposed. Around 1000 members. Membership increasing over the last couple of years.
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	Confirmed.
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	Initiatives on communication with members and visitors continues via newsletter, the website etc informing on best practices and nature-related information of the course. CIP: Raise awareness of the site fauna and flora richness with information board/ informative QR code or other forms of display on the course. Provide digital document/ flyer shared with visitors and / or members to inform about the club's commitment to sustainability and all its initiatives.
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage	Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement	Data shows continued support and initiatives.

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