

# GEO Certified® Independent Verification Report



**Golf Facility: Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club**

**Prepared by: Tony Hanson**

**Date: January 2019**

## Executive Summary

This on-site verification was undertaken on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018, to review the application for initial GEO Certification by Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club. Present were James Bledge (Course Manager and coordinator of the GEO OnCourse and certification application) and members of course, house and pro-shop staff.

Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club is an 18-hole links golf course located on the Sandwich Bay in the East of Kent, founded in 1892 it has operated as a members' club throughout its 126 year history.

In addition to the course, the Club benefits from a significant and attractive clubhouse with putting green and practice areas located in and around the buildings.

As with much of the bedrock on the South-East coast of England, the course sits on a chalk sedimentary base, with superficial deposits of blown sand which have been stabilised by the development of the golf course. However, this provides greens that subtly change in their cambers and borrows over time.

There is one borehole mentioned on the British Geological Survey website noted as 'Golf Club, Deal' which has a depth of 15.85 m and was sunk in 1937 with a pumping capacity of 3000 gallons per hour for 12 hours per day identified at that time. However, this borehole is no longer in use. The drilling record does indicate that they found a clay strata of 12 feet between the surface sand and the lower chalk and clay shale layers.

## Nature

During the visit it became very clear that the management had a very sound understanding of the ecological importance of the site. The Club is situated in or close to several protected and sensitive habitats that host numerous rare species of flora and fauna that have been embraced by the management.

There is always a compromise between nature and the golf course and finding the balance can be a challenge, however, Royal Cinque Ports provides sympathetic management and habitat enhancement without compromising the golfing experience.

During the course walk I was shown projects including the creation of wetland, exposed sand scrapes, decaying wood and brush piles and encouraging Maram grass (*Psamma arenaria*).

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The Club has worked with The Wildlife Trusts and local nature groups to bring in expert knowledge to both enhance their site and to help for connections and corridors across and beyond the course.

The species and locations across the site are being recorded, resulting in a lengthy list of sightings and some superb images.

The areas of amenity grass on the course are regularly reviewed to ensure the optimum playing area, and to maximise the naturalised land area across the site.

The turf grass species being cultivated provide a balance of the required quality of playing surface, tolerance to the local soil and weather conditions and resistance to disease. The cultural practices adopted by the management team, together with the site knowledge, help reduce the need for chemical intervention and drought tolerance.

The attention to detail and clear enthusiasm of the course management team results in a fantastic quality course and greens, in evidence during this visit in December and following one of the driest summers on record.

The Club's location, soil and bedrock result in open pathways to the surrounding land, much of which is noted by DEFRA as having significant scientific and ecological importance in addition to the proximity of the wider marine environment.

The management of turfgrass application methods reflect the potential hazards involved in course maintenance. Staff training and qualifications are maintained and refreshed, chemicals and fuels are stored in bunded areas, stock records are maintained, and vehicle wash water is treated by a proprietary oil water separator prior to discharge.

Weather conditions are taken in to account before pesticide or fertiliser spraying takes place, and non-spray buffer zones protect water courses and other ecologically sensitive areas.

The maintenance buildings are kept clean and tidy, with spill kits and health and safety equipment available in key locations.

### Resources

The Club uses non-potable water for irrigation and potable mains water for clubhouse supply.

The irrigation system was undergoing a significant upgrade at the time of the visit which will lead to improved efficiency when completed in the early part of 2019. Although this technology upgrade will certainly help efficiency the Club will continue with the good practices to minimise the use of irrigation and ensure targeted application already in place.

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Clubhouse use varies with footfall and general clubhouse use, but the management are engaging with players and guests to encourage careful and considerate use on water on site.

The Club uses a solid fuel boiler for clubhouse heating with a water-based radiator distribution system, with mains grid electricity and diesel and petrol for owned vehicles.

The club has introduced LED's and Passive Infrared Sensors (PIR's) on lighting in certain areas of the site to help reduce operational times and consumption, together with staff engagement to help reduce heating loads.

LED and PIR installation will hopefully be completed across the site within the next GEO Certification cycle, together with the continuation of awareness raising among all stakeholders to help reduce use and consumption.

The maintenance vehicles are predominantly a mix of petrol and diesel powered with two electric utility vehicles which are effectively undergoing long term trials to help determine future vehicle fleet plans.

Purchasing decisions made by the Club include environmental and community considerations to improve both sustainability and maximise local spending.

Waste separation and hierarchy are implemented to increase the potential and value of the waste produced through operations across the site. In addition, this closer management review of materials has resulted in the potential introduction of reusable drinks cups for on course use resulting in a significant reduction in single use plastic.

### Community

The Club provides numerous opportunities for use and engagement within and beyond the traditional golf community.

The Club hosts charity events raising funds for various good causes in addition to access for wildlife groups and walkers on the fringes of the course. Signage and interpretation information is provided both within the clubhouse and on the paths that surround the course.

Staff employment and training provide opportunities for local community members to work at the club and the potential to develop a career within the golf and leisure sector.

### Conclusion

I, Tony Hanson, independent accredited verifier, recommend Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club to be awarded the GEO Certified® ecolabel because of the broad range of initiatives undertaken to enhance sustainability and community engagement.

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The engagement with The Wildlife Trusts, local groups and enthusiasm of club staff has resulted in habitat creation including wetland, water, dune slack, bee hive and bug hotels is to be highly commended.

Investment in water efficiency has been substantial and the continued work on energy efficiency will only increase the savings already achieved.

Well done to everyone at Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club, I look forward to seeing the progress over the next three years.