

GC2030



University Centre
Myerscough
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

Golf Course 2030

Golf Course Condition and Playability

Sustainability Guidelines and
Support for Clubs: A Summary



If we make a few good decisions today, we can buy ourselves ecological time.

Breitbarth at al., 2017

The presenting problem

There have been many great achievements in the world of golf during recent times, however, these accomplishments are amongst landscape of growing pressures and environmental concerns - including climate change, resource constraints (e.g. water shortages) and increased regulation.

The purpose of this project, therefore, is to support golf clubs by providing a series of best practice sustainability guidelines for course condition and quality beyond the greens, including: teeing areas, fairways, first cut rough, bunkers, and green aprons.

An extensive review of academic and industry research was supplemented with interviews from key industry stakeholders.

Results help support golf clubs to:

1. Establish course condition and playability quality standards
2. Develop an action plan to manage course condition against quality standards

The report equips clubs with a roadmap to assess which programs are essential to their individual strategy and culture, which they could do without, and where they can innovate on current practices.

Readers are encouraged to use this summary document as a supplement to the main report, to help identify which sections are most applicable to individual club priority areas.

Golf club self-assessment: Establishing what 'quality' means

3.1 Identifying core market and aligning the golf product:

No two golf clubs are the same and their approach to course quality will vary depending on a number of factors. Clubs should firstly identify their target demographic, then use this to align their overall identity and course condition and playability priorities.

There are a series typographical (e.g. climate, landscape, and soil type) and membership type (whether that be 'traditional' or 'family') considerations part of this dynamic. Clubs must regularly evaluate what aspects of condition and quality are key to golf experience offered, and how this impacts resource management of course priority areas.



3.2 'Back to the future': New directions in course condition and playability: Climate change, constraints, and regulation are making it increasingly difficult for courses to be maintained in pristine condition, even despite how many

resources they might have at hand. The overall trajectory is towards future trends of more 'rugged and natural' courses, similar to original courses, with a focus on firmer, faster, turf and increased demand on creativity and shot making.

3.3 Managing player expectations: Rise of the 'Experience Economy':

As golf courses trend towards more traditional design features, it is becoming more important to manage players' expectations of what courses will look like. A more traditional and unique golf offering aligns itself with the rise of the 'experience economy', where consumers are seeking memorable events, stories and worthwhile experiences. This is an opportunity for golf to promote the unique character and differences between courses, where players can test themselves in its raw and natural environment, while embracing the story of club identities.

4. Teeing areas: Tee size should be sufficiently large to cope with volume of play, while also not being so vast to increase operational demands. Size of tee will also vary dependant upon length and type of hole. Opting for grass type appropriate to the site location in question is important for these high traffic areas. Tee elevation is a relevant consideration to facilitate drainage and improve visibility of hole. Choices on accessorising tees should be aligned with course experience offered and place in the market.



5. Fairways: Striped mowing patterns tend to be less efficient than 'half-and-half' in terms of labour, fuel consumption, and equipment wear. Consideration should be made to the effects of removal or dispersion of grass cuttings to the golf experience. Fairway width considerations should be aligned with market demographics, whereby reducing width can cut demands but negatively impact speed of play, and widening fairways will increase inputs but may lead to quicker rounds. Distance and size of landing areas represents a similar consideration. A process of regular aeration, top-dressing, and divoting can help ensure quality and levelness of fairway surfaces by aiding the promotion of deep-rooted grass swards.

6. First cut rough: Although generally low maintenance, the volume of first cut rough across the entire course, combined with temperatures rises and associated irrigation requirements over the long term, mean input costs can add up. Clubs are required to consider the role of first cut mown rough, and



whether it could be replaced with naturalized or unmown rough, to reduce costs with little impact on quality and playability. Naturalized rough with reduced input can have a dramatic positive visual and strategic impact on the overall golf experience. Mowing height and frequency must also be considered in line with target market demands.



7. Bunkers: Often one of the most demand intense aspects of the course, improvements can be made by targeting efficiency of bunkers without a noticeable change in overall course quality. Clubs are encouraged to consider how bunker placement impacts on strategy of play when compared to original course design. There is scope for bunkers to be removed, remodelled, reconstructed, or replaced with different hazards (such as 'grass bunkers') where appropriate.

The general trend is towards presenting bunkers in a more natural state, being less managed and removing rakes, which can significantly reduce inputs and help return to a traditional way of playing the game. Reducing slopes in and around bunkers, and raising surrounding ground, can help facilitate water dissemination and reduce potential for washouts. Bunker liners can also be used where appropriate, where initial investment can be offset by reduced maintenance and sand replacement in the long term.

8. Green aprons: Aprons should be managed as an extension of the green itself. Drainage is key to achieve the desired firmness, where a herringbone design with 3% slope has been suggested. Care should be taken to ensure sprinklers are set to avoid overwatering aprons. Certain grasses, such as *Poa Annua*, do not perform well as green aprons when subjected to the amount of traffic and over regulation they often receive. Some courses have reported success by removing aprons completely and allowing the fairway to grow directly to the edge of the green, with little impact on course quality and golfer experience.

The golf industry needs to understand that we are just custodians of the land. We need to hand the land back in better condition than when we started. If we focus on this, everybody wins.

(Industry voice)