

High Post Golf Club



Photo: Courtesy of High Post Golf Club

Overview

High Post Golf Club is a golf club near Salisbury in Wiltshire with a strong sustainable development and management focus. The club has a 6,305 yards, par-70, 18-hole course with 70 bunkers.

In recent years, managers have noticed more extremes in the weather, with occasions of heavy bursts of rain as well as longer dry periods – in 2006 the club experienced quite a severe drought. This has significant impacts for the way in which the course is managed, as the greens require sufficient water all-year-round. Without adapting to these changing weather conditions, the quality of the grass would suffer and golfers may be put off, consequently damaging the business.

Climate change may also present opportunities for the golf club, as potentially longer summers and milder winters will provide better conditions for golfing.

With the economic downturn and increasing risks of climate change, High Post Golf Club sees managing its course in a sustainable way, including adapting to the changing climate, as essential to its success. Best practice is now a necessity, not just an ideal.

Climate change adaptation actions

- Adopted a water allocation process to the greens so that less water is now used
- Introduced drought-resistant grasses, which are now beginning to flourish. The correct choice of species is essential in order to provide the correct quality of turf, upon which golf is dependent
- Encouraging return of indigenous fine fescue grasses that require less management and moving away from the less desirable species. For the UK there is overwhelming evidence that blends of fine-leaved browntop bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) with fescues, i.e. Chewings fescue (*Festuca rubra* ssp. *commutata*) and slender creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra* ssp. *litoralis*, also known as ssp. *Trichophylla*), best fulfil the demands of economic and environmental sustainability on golf courses
- Use of fertiliser is carefully managed, taking into account a number of influences, including climate
- Reduced the use of fungicides to combat disease, as the change in processes have reduced the likelihood of disease

Benefits

- High quality turf which requires less water and provides high quality golfing conditions.
- Reduction in water use enables adherence to the Environment Agency's stringent restrictions placed on the club for water usage
- Increased reputation – recognised by the R&A (the World's governing body for rules and development of the game) as a prime example of a club 'on course for sustainability'
- Improved revenues from more a more discerning and environmentally savvy younger generation
- Reduction in costs (expensive fungicides)

Challenges

Membership support was the biggest challenge. Initially the focus was to bring on board the unpaid officials of the club by outlining the plan and why we had to pursue it. After that we needed wider support from the majority of members. This was achieved by holding an open forum for members to attend and using our expert agronomist to answer questions after a presentation.

It focussed on why we had to adapt and set out expectations/timescales. Members' biggest concern has been the speed of the greens – as one of our adaptation measures was to increase the height of the cut – which initially has the impact of slowing the pace the balls runs over the surface. But by introducing more brushing/rolling and use of a growth regulator these concerns have been allayed – allowing us to pursue the long term improvement whilst still providing excellent greens.

Further thoughts

Advice from High Post Golf Club to other tourism businesses:

- Plan for future climate change and don't be frightened to bang the drum and get some publicity for being pro-active – it's usually free marketing!

Further changes or adaptations that High Post plan in the future:

- More extensive use of growth regulators in turn reduce the requirement for irrigation and mowing. That means less water resources are used and less fuel is needed as the grass needs mowing less.

Sources of information and practical help that they found helpful:

- The R& A and the Sports Turf Research Institute (specific to golf/turf)

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Relevant links:

Website: www.highpostgolf.co.uk