

And the winner is...

Lee Penrose reveals the winners in the 2004 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition – which saw Minchinhampton Golf Club take the overall title.

Well, it's the December issue again and, true to form, the results of the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition are now (just) in. I am writing this article on a Sunday morning on the day before the deadline for the December issue of Greenkeeper International.

This is not because we couldn't be bothered before, or even that we have been busy doing other things, it's simply that the judging and decision making for the 2004 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition has taken up so much discussion, debate and deliberation that the final results were not decided upon until late into Friday evening with minutes to spare before the results were given to Ken and Sami at BIGGA to announce to the world!

You can probably imagine then, that the competition this year has been the toughest yet. Bob Taylor and I carried out all of the judging, visiting golf clubs ranging from Reay Golf Club, in Caithness, (the most northerly golf club in mainland Britain) down through the length of the UK to Worthing Golf Club, in West Sussex, which lies 734 miles to the south!

Such was the quality of the initial entry forms this year, which included PowerPoint presentations, photographs, ecological and environmental management plans, letters of recommendation from Wildlife Groups and a host of other imaginative supplementary information, that choosing the allotted 20 clubs to receive a judging visit was impossible.

Therefore, after much deliberation and some creative timetabling, we managed to decide upon 27 clubs that would each receive a visit from either Bob Taylor or myself.

This year the generous sponsors for the competition, Scotts UK, Syngenta Professional Products and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), have allowed us to distribute the most prizes to date, thus ensuring that interest and motivation for environmental issues has been tremendous.

New prizes for this year include the 'Best use of recycled products' and a new position of 'Overall runner-up'. Ten prizes have been allocated in all and the results are listed below.

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The level of dedication to maintaining all ecological habitats on the course combined with a progressive attitude toward environmental management gained Minchinhampton Golf club the coveted title of 2004 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition **Overall Winners**.

- The Overall winner was Minchinhampton Golf Club, who receive £2,000 and a Scott's Weather Master Station.
- The overall runner-up was Hankley Common Golf Club, who receive £500.
- The five regional winners, also receiving a £500 prize, were; Scotland: Brighthouse Bay Golf Club; Northern: Fulford Golf Club; Wales: Garnant Park Golf Club; Midland: Notts (Hollinwell) Golf Club; South-east: Thorpeness Golf Club.
- The £500 prize for the Best Newcomer went to Felixstowe Ferry Golf Club.
- Most Impressive Initiative went to Taunton & Pickering Golf Club.
- The Prize for Best use of Recycled Products was won by Bath Golf Club.

What are the judges looking for when assessing entrants to the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition?

The first consideration has to be the overall quality of the application submitted and in particular the detail of information provided.

Given the high numbers of entrants, a cut off point must be determined to give a manageable number of clubs to visit for further assessment.

The quantitative score sheet used by the judges to assess applications determines this score, which must be achieved to progress further.

This year saw the highest quality of applications to date with some clubs providing very eloquent dossiers covering each of the questions asked. Others, particularly those who have entered previously, tended to just resubmit the application form from the previous year with minimal information.

It should be noted however that any additional information previously included may actually still be held



by BIGGA. This does however create some difficulty because the judges must retain an unbiased stance, scoring the quality of the application submitted.

The application form itself contains a number of questions relating to the degree of commitment and awareness of the green staff and the golf club. Clearly the golf club must be supportive of the green staff if the projects are to receive long-term sustainability.

Other important topics relate to whether the golf course and the management being given has improved the quality of the wider landscape and would the golf course satisfy a critical conservationist looking for areas of negativity?

There are always likely to be areas or issues that could be improved but what is the club doing about them, are these issues recognised and are they being considered within the longer-term project?

The judges will look for gradual improvements to both habitats and species and these are scored over a range of 0-5.

Ecological training in particular is an important criteria; while many of the greenkeeping staff are well trained in pesticide use for example, relatively few have received specific training such as through the various BIGGA or STRI courses that are run annually. Also, few have received training to a specified level as directed through the GTC or other college scheme.

Communication is an area where golf clubs can score highly. This is an important area but again needs to be well embraced by the golf club as a whole if the green staff are to be allowed to manage outside the boundaries of the principal cutting and playing surfaces. Newsletters can be an effective way of informing the membership.



A number of clubs do include regular snippets on features of ecological interest such as the 'fly agaric mushroom, its toxic and other interesting properties' or 'How to age a hedgerow' – members do tend to find these small features of particular interest.

At many clubs newsletters are being phased out, being replaced by the club's internet website. As well as potentially reaching a much wider audience this approach will help reduce paper consumption.

The level of outreach and liaison with statutory/non-statutory organisations and the wider public is also an area of interest to the judges.

A good start here would be to develop the website to cover ecological and environmental issues so that when, for example, trees are being removed or areas of potential damage created, the general public, by logging on to the website, can appreciate why such work is taking place.

The waste and energy efficiency policies are increasingly being met with as much interest as the nature conservation policies.

Such is the quality of ecological course management being undertaken that these environmental issues are often becoming the deciding factors in judging the competition.

A number of clubs have been in communication with the local authorities, possibly in some cases becoming local recycling centres.

The level of waste produced by the golf industry is considerable and this clearly ranges from papers to packaging in the clubhouse through to tyres, batteries and oils in the maintenance complex and organic wastes collected during routine maintenance work on the golf course. Very few golf clubs have a totally committed waste programme but most are at least striving towards gradual improvement.

The efficient use of energy, although receiving specific interest from the judges, is at many clubs being thought about but rarely taken forward in any serious manner.

While some clubhouses have been designed with energy efficiency in mind, others are being gradually improved with energy efficiency being at the forefront of the design criteria.

Such measures are relatively easy to quantify simply by calculating the annual costs and building in the perceived savings following the cost of installation of any equipment necessary (motion sensors for example on

On Course
Deep rough is maintained for the diversity of wild flowers and grasses, with scattered gorse and hawthorn. The rocky knolls are used by nesting Skylark.

Landscape and Cultural History
Open grassland with gorse knolls, broad views of the sea with the site of Man 30 kilometres to the south, defines the landscape character.
The drystone dykes and the remnant of Galloway dyke – a unique combination of low wall and Hawthorn hedge – were probably built by dykers from the time of Man 260 years ago. People have been in the area much longer, as the Bormess fort confirms. This promontory fort site, made up of a series of ramparts and ditches, is around 3000 years old.

Wetlands and Ponds
At the heart of the course is the Reed Bed water treatment system by the first green. It is a breeding site for the Sedge Warbler, and rich insect habitat. Pond margins are feeding and bathing areas for Oystercatcher and other birds.

Brighouse Bay Golf Course
Nature, Landscape, History
The Whole in One

Brown Hares abound on the rough: sheltering, feeding and chaffing. Look out for leverets near the gorse knolls.

Thanks to:
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Design and Art work by Brian Arnell Environment.

Brighouse eco plan of course – This superb poster from Brighouse Bay Golf Club is a tremendous communication tool and also a good example of supplementary information included with the application.





The competition is increasingly taking into consideration environmental issues such as recycling, composting, energy efficiency and water management.

urinals or motion sensors on switches for lighting).

Possibly the first step for any golf club to consider would be to engage Envirowise (www.envirowise.gov.uk) to undertake a full energy efficiency audit for the golf club. Energy audits are being undertaken free of charge and will provide a series of recommendations that could be progressed over time. This clearly would be given favour by the



judges and would score quite highly.

It is obviously unfortunate that the judges cannot visit and appreciate every golf club entering the competition (financial resources are limiting) but this should not deter individual clubs from continuing with the excellent work that is being undertaken.

Every year the level of entrants varies and, who knows, perhaps it may be possible for the judges to visit a number of different clubs next year.

The judges do strive to provide as much information to those clubs visited as can be practicably accommodated and this in itself is being seen by many clubs as sufficient reason to enter. Those clubs going on to receive prize money clearly see recognition that can be used to further progress the environmental programmes underway.

The judges do recognise that simply by the continuation of this successful competition, the whole of the golf industry is benefiting by the fact that golf clubs are being seen to be aware of environmental responsibilities.

This is well exemplified by the recognition and contributions provided through the statutory conservation organisations and through the generous sponsorship of environmental bodies such as WRAP.



■ An in-depth report on the work carried out at each of the winning clubs will appear in a forthcoming issue.



Why you should enter next year

If you have never entered the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition before, there are many sound reasons why you should do and if you have entered before why you should keep entering.

Probably one of the most significant and important reasons is that, over the past 8 years or so since this competition was taken over and run through BIGGA, there has been a gradual acceptance throughout the general public that golf is a very positive land use, providing important habitat for much of our dwindling wildlife.

English Nature recently quoted that **'golf is good for wildlife and wildlife is good for golf'**.

Mr Tom Tew (South East Regional Manager for English Nature) at a recent EGU Masterclass stated that **'golf courses are good for wildlife because, and not despite, they are golf courses'**.

Such phrases represent a marked change by the statutory conservation organisations which in turn is spreading to the wider public.

This allows for more positive discussions to be held with local and county wildlife groups, local authorities and anyone taking an interest in our industry.

The above, I believe, has arisen primarily due to the passion and commitment of a few individuals working relentlessly to improve the environmental awareness of golf, the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition has been a major driving force of this wide ranging and broad revolution.

