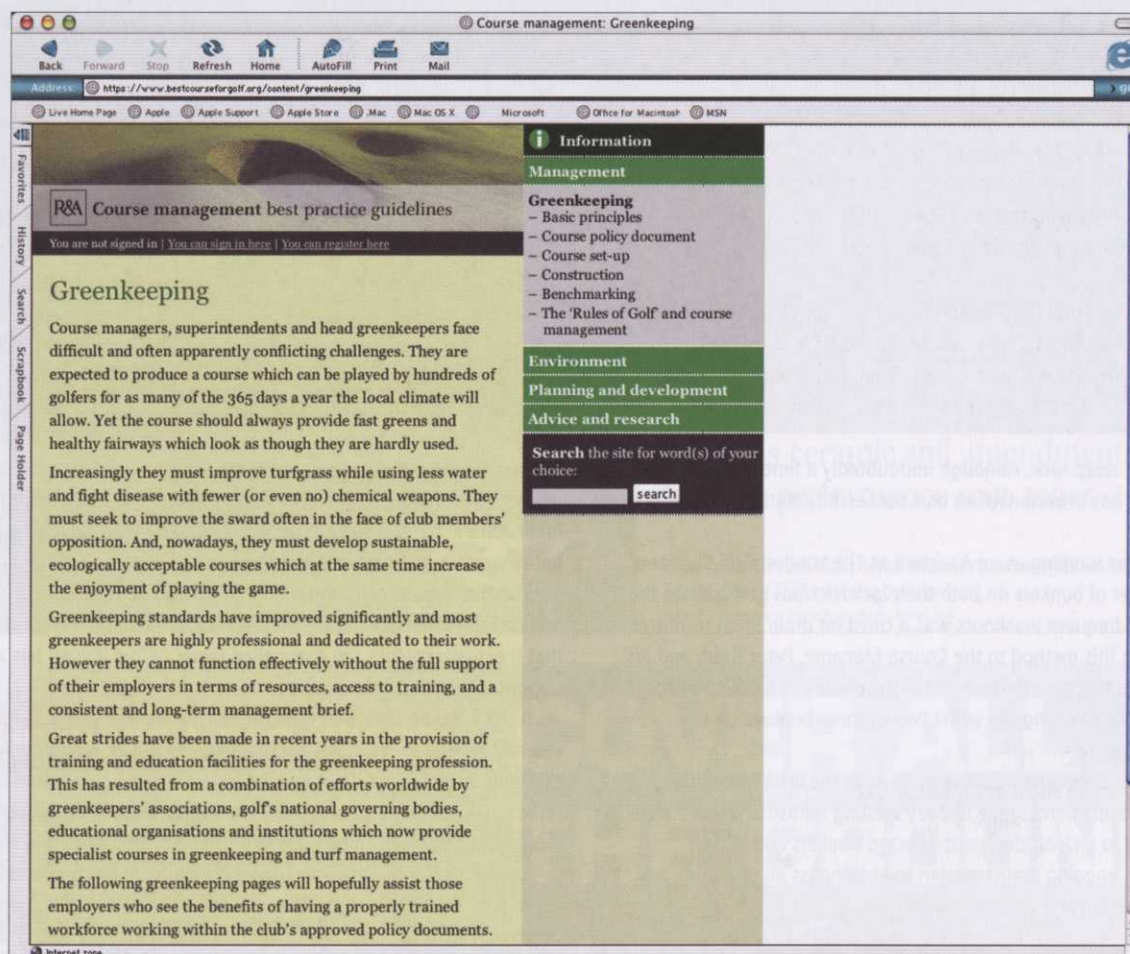


The R&A's Course Management Best Practice Guidelines

Steve Isaac, Assistant Director - Golf Course Management introduces the new R&A website.



THE WEBSITE

February 18 saw the launch of our Course Management Best Practice Guidelines website, www.bestcourseforgolf.org. It could be said the production of this website has been "in response to popular demand".

At the end of 2001, golf administrators and greenkeepers at the "Changing Course in Europe" conference in Portugal called for the R&A to take the lead on a number of pressing issues such as co-ordination of research, promoting the good name of golf to national governments and the European Union in Brussels - and promoting best practices in course management.

Since then, the need for help, guidance and leadership has been underlined by the increasingly stringent environment legislation the game of golf has to observe.

The purpose of this article is to explain the reasoning behind the development of the website, provide an introduction to the site and outline our hopes for its use.

WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE?

Our definition of best practice is:

Management of golf courses in an environmentally and economically sustainable way.

One would hope that every course is managed to these fundamental principles. Any golf course is an integral feature of its environment and what happens on the course will have an impact on the ecosystem of the course and adjacent land.

Each club also has to live within its means, so economics has to influence course management policy. Fortunately, in most instances, environmental and economic sustainability often complement course quality.

Anyone working outside these parameters now has increasingly stringent environment-led legislation to contend with. You may have seen the implications of national government interpretation of EU Directives in Sweden and the Netherlands highlighted in the September issue of *Greenkeeper International*. This is a global phenomenon and not just restricted to Europe.

We must never forget that golf courses are a form of land management and this, in itself, requires positive action and inputs. Peter Dawson, the R&A's Chief Executive, summed this all up very well by stating:

"The challenge for golf is to maintain course quality and playability while respecting and positively contributing to the social and natural environment."



WHY HAS THE R&A DEVELOPED THE WEBSITE?

In addition to the call for the R&A to take a leading role in matters pertaining to course management, as previously mentioned, the R&A has a history of contributing to this subject.

The documents, "The Way Forward", published in 1989, and "A Course for All Seasons" (1997), were the product of the R&A's Golf Course Advisory Panel which was formed in 1986. Latterly, the Golf Course Committee has taken on much of the Panel's work but to a more dynamic remit.

The website is a natural progression from the publications mentioned, and a great deal more. Most of you will know the R&A as the organisation which hosts The Open Championship every year and is responsible, along with the United States Golf Association, for the Rules of Golf.

The R&A is far more deeply involved in promoting the development of the game at home and, increasingly, abroad. Production of the best practice guidelines is a major step for the R&A within this objective. It is a statement of intent and support for those implementing or trying to implement sound greenkeeping.

Persuading those in government or environmental lobby groups who may be anti-golf that we are responsible users of land and can produce sustainable courses has to be a positive contribution to the worldwide development of the game.

WHAT WILL YOU FIND ON THE SITE?

Access and use of the site is **completely free of charge**.

On entering the site we strongly advise that you study the downloadable User Guide. Read this and you will be able to make the most of the site.

The information on the site has been divided into the following sections:

- Management
- Greenkeeping
- Environment
- Planning and development
- Advice and research

The text is comprehensive yet intended to provide guidelines and not the definitive way to manage your golf course. We hope the guidance helps everyone using the site to develop a management system and programme which gets the best out of their club and course – but the manner in which this is achieved has to be site specific.

In the space of a brief introduction it would be impossible to give a worthwhile taster of the site's content but it does concentrate on the need for partnership, communication and documentation for a successful management operation, e.g. through the production of a business plan, course management policy and environmental statement. The best way to find out what is on the site is to visit www.bestcourseforgolf.org.

It has been a difficult task to produce material comprehensive enough to satisfy the needs of those we hope will make use of it, yet not so detailed that it is irrelevant to those not working on courses in temperate climates such as the UK.

Remember that, just like any other site, ours can be viewed globally

and the R&A has a responsibility to all of its affiliated national governing bodies, ie. the golf unions, federations and associations that number more than 120, not just those based in Britain and Ireland.

We hope to have gone some way toward achieving this, but await feedback to help us develop the site so it is of real value to those responsible for course management around the world.

If the content of the site does not answer your question, the Advice and Research section is its "Yellow Pages" where links to the most respected organisations around the world can be found - these are sources of specific, detailed information.

The website does not only contain text. Those directly involved in course management can register to the site and complete checklists which will help in the professional, documented management of the club and its course.

The information you enter on to your site area is secure and only you can access this to manage the input. The R&A can view details of the clubs that register and how much they are making use of the site but not the comments linked to the checklists nor the content of any documents you produce as a result of working to the guidelines.

WHO IS THE SITE AIMED AT?

The obvious answer to this is anyone involved in course management. Hopefully, course managers, greenkeepers, club committees, agronomists and the host of other professionals working in this field will gain from the use of the site.

However, beyond the obvious, the site is open to anyone, so club members and the general public can dip into our world and see how complex and technical looking after turf has become!

Great pains have been taken to compile text in plain English (with the possibility for translation into many other languages) and to produce information which is fully supportive of those working to or towards best practice. Whether striding down this road or wishing to start down the path of sustainability, the vast majority of greenkeepers have nothing to fear from the website and, we believe, much to gain.

THE FUTURE FOR THE SITE

What you see now is just the beginning – it is a skeleton that will need fleshing out. We are fully aware of the need to constantly review the site, to see it evolve and sustain its intended purpose. This is a project that will never be finished.

Some of the information will change with time as innovations in turf management appear. Additional material will be posted as our programmes of research and technical investigation progress. **Your** contributions and suggestions will be a vital part of this evolution, so do feed your thoughts and ideas back to me:

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We hope many of you will make regular use of the site and hope you find it of value as a management tool. Most of all, we hope you take ownership of the site and help it to evolve.