

Course Feature

More than just a Golf Club

Reigning BIGGA Golf Environment Competition winners, Kenwick Park, is much more than 18 holes of golf as Scott MacCallum found out.

Members of Kenwick Park Golf Club, in Louth, Lincolnshire, have options not always available to those at other golf clubs.

They can stick the clubs in the back of the car and hook up with a few fellow members for a friendly fourball or leave the clubs in the garage whip out the walking shoes and binoculars and spend a few hours strolling along the club's nature trail or watching wildlife from one of the two hides within the confines of the club.

Kenwick Park is more than just a golf club and it was this fact that was recognised by the judges in the R&A supported BIGGA Golf Environment Competition sponsored by Scotts, Symbio and now WRAP, when they voted the club the 2003 National winner.

The success came following a concerted campaign over the last five years which had seen the club winning runners-up awards and regularly being mentioned in dispatches by the judges and also becoming the second English club, behind the De Vere Belfry, to attain Committed to Green status.

"It meant a lot to an awful lot of people," said Ian Shepherd, Chairman of the club's Environment Panel.

"Clearly not every member is interested but the level of enthusiasm within members and staff really made it all worthwhile and generated a lot of excitement. As a result the work of the Environment Panel has received a lot of support."

The Panel had been the brainchild of club Secretary, Paddy Shillington, who had experience of moorland and heather management from a previous role. He passed the Chairmanship of the Panel over to Ian after being advised by the taxman that people who work for the club shouldn't be involved in the actual management of it.

"When Ian took over and was able to formalise what we had been doing and apply his considerable skills to it, it really took off," said Paddy.

He is equally sure that it was the club's overall involvement and interest in the environment, as well as their previous track record in the competition, which led Kenwick Park to winning a competition for which the roll of honour carries some prestigious names – Hankley Common, Lindrick, Temple, The Dyke, Broadstone and Ipswich.

"Every year we've moved forward and each time the judges have returned we've done what has been asked of us



and what we promised we would do. If they hadn't given it to us it would have been a travesty of justice," he laughed.

And perhaps it would have been, as a look at what has been carried out at Kenwick, a club which as only formed in 1992, shows the height at which the bar has been set for future winners.

The catalyst for all the good work was indeed the Environment Panel which, in addition to Ian, comprises an ornithologist; an expert on butterflies and moths; a botanist; a bat expert and two foresters, as well as, in a non-voting capacity, Course Manager, Geoff Henderson, who was a farm manager at the Kenwick Estate before becoming involved with the golf course when it was under construction.

"We started with two principals. The first being that the golf must come first as, if we didn't have a golf course the Panel wouldn't exist to do the work. Secondly, the activities of the Panel mustn't be seen as a drain on the club's resources. We didn't want members to feel that their subscription money was being used for something that perhaps they weren't interested in," explained Ian.

With that in mind the first objective was to raise some funds and this was done initially with a successful quiz night run in the clubhouse. Since then there has been regular golf events including night golf with luminous equipment and a barbecue while there is now two regular Environment Panel events on the calendar - a Texas Scramble and barbecue over a spring Bank Holiday and a Fur and Feathers Stableford competition in the first weekend in December with vouchers for a local farm shop as prizes.

"With an income you can then get more funding by applying for grants and we've been successful in our applications for money for wild flower planting, hedgerow planting, planting reeds, and constructing an island. We're also hoping to be successful in gaining grant aid for our major composting project," said Ian.

Paddy is quick to praise Ian for his ability to secure additional funding.

"This is where Ian is brilliant. It is all in the application and locating the potential grants because all the people with the funding want to do is spend it on something which can't be criticised. It's a great opportunity for golf," said Paddy.

Ian reinforced the view adding that the funding bodies usually have an objective in mind which must be satisfied.

"For example our wildflower project was alongside the public footpath because it had to have a public amenity element to it," said Ian, who did say that Kenwick's position in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty helped when it came to attracting grant aid.

When the club began down the environmental path the first job was to audit the flora and fauna already on site and since then they have introduced a card system which means that if any member sees anything he or she feels might be of environmental interest it can be logged.

"That way we've got a record year-on-year of the species which are thriving or which might be distressed. Our ornithologist also gives us a quarterly report on what he's seen and his view on how things are progressing. We use the information to assess whether our habitat management is making a positive impact," explained Ian, who added that the club database currently contains well over 1200 different species of flora and fauna with the biggest increase coming on the moth record as a result of the moth expert using his moth trap to collect and identify more varieties.

"We've also had help from Bob Taylor, of the STRI, in identifying fungi found on the course."

The club also boasts three extremely fine black swans and while they are, in themselves, quite splendid they also have a more practical benefit to the golf course.





The Kenwick Park team.



Geoff Henderson, Ian Shepherd and Paddy Shillington.



The reservoir

"They were donated by the Club Chairman and as they are particularly territorial they have been extremely beneficial in keeping away Canada geese and coots which had been making a mess of our fairways," said Ian.

The club's environmental work spreads further than merely the golf course with the clubhouse and surrounds also coming under the Environmental Panel's spotlight.

"We've got bottle banks and recycle newspapers while we also have low energy light bulbs throughout the clubhouse and signs on all the light switches telling people to switch off when not required.

The man responsible for co-ordinating the environmental work with that of the regular course maintenance is Geoff, who has a team of six to manage the 200 acre site which contains areas of woodland, parkland, grassland and lakeland.

"It is a very diverse variety of areas we've got to maintain," agreed Geoff, who is proud of the club's reputation as having one of the finest courses in the area and one which can provide a test for all levels of golfer from the holiday golfer to the category one player and PGA pro.

"We clear areas within the trees to keep the golfers happy and cut the long rough on a regular basis while the areas not regarded as in play are maintained with a view to protecting and encouraging wildlife. We also have a lot of lake banks and dykes to maintain," said Geoff, adding that virtually every project is carried out in-house.

The most recent member of the greenkeeping team was employed because the new composting project requires extra labour – there are sacks placed strategically around the course for the dumping of clippings which will hopefully be replaced with bins which can be accessed by machinery rather than emptied by hand.

It is envisaged that the compost produced in the scheme will be put back onto the course, thus reducing the amount of fertiliser required.

"The environmental element has added a certain amount to the workload but it means we have also altered some of the ways we've done things as opposed to making extra work. For instance there are some areas we haven't cut back as much as we have in the past and some areas we've cut differently to encourage different types of wildlife.

"You do get a 'feel good' factor from the work and it is a super place to work in any case," said Geoff, who added that his team enjoyed on-going education through Myerscough College and locally sourced training courses.

Paddy is quick to point out that having such a comparatively young golf course creates a lot more work that would normally be found on one which is more mature.

"In the time I've been here we've built 11 tees; altered 11 fairways; built a reservoir and added to the clubhouse. We're not standing still on any front and we always feel we are better this year than last year and better last year than the year before in terms of presentation and definition of the course. We're not there yet, but we're not far off."

The prize for winning the Environment Competition was £2000 and a weather station which has proven to be a big hit with the club not least in its ability to predict disease.

"On one occasion we had a prediction that conditions were absolutely right for fusarium and within three or four days we had it, but we had been able to put preventative measures in place," said Geoff.

The money has been put away towards the cost of a composting machine together with that won at the local Lincolnshire Environmental Awards which were chaired by the botanist David Belamy.

"He made a few comments at the presentation and was really singing the praises of golf and golf courses. He thought, and has thought for sometime, that they are wonderful places for wildlife," said Ian.

Ian is also quick to point out how successful the Environmental Panel has been in influencing some of the club's decision making,

"The reservoir project, at around £24,000 is the biggest the club has undertaken since it opened, and was done with a long term aim of guarding the club against water shortages in the future as well as the obvious short term benefits.

"The Panel contributed around £1500 to the project and also planted the hedgerow behind it to finish it off. The original design was the most economical way of storing water and was a rectangular shape but because of advice we'd received we were able to influence the design to incorporate attractive bays and a shallow area designed to encourage bird life."

That has proven to be so successful that one of the two hides owned by the club is about to be erected overlooking the reservoir. The other hide is deep in the natural trail and displays the evidence of one of the more mischievous of species.

"Squirrels have damaged the door to allow them access and then gnawed their way through the plastic bins in which we stored the bird food. We've had to move it to a metal container," revealed Geoff.

Overall the environmental work has added a great deal to Kenwick Park Golf Club.

"People who may not be the greatest golfers but are perhaps experts in other fields can contribute and they feel that the club is as much theirs as the low handicappers. I know of one chap who comes up nearly every week and wanders around in the evenings. He really enjoys it and gets value out of his membership," said Paddy.

So what would he say to other clubs thinking about perhaps entering the competition?

"It's the best way of getting free advice you could ever have. There is so much benefit in the early days from the judges visit and even if you don't win you still get so much out of it," said Paddy, who can't wait until the three year non-entry period imposed on winners is over so the club can have another go.

