

Nothing to Fear from Best Practice

The R&A's Steve Isaac, Assistant Director of Golf Course Management, explains the role of the Best Practice website.



The R&A's Course Management Best Practice guidelines website, www.bestcourseforgolf.org, provides the opportunity for clubs across the world to compare their operations against the basic principles of best practice. Many will welcome this challenge, some will already match up to its checklists and a few may exceed the demands of this interactive site.

The benefits of operating to best practice cannot be overemphasised, for the greenkeeper and the golfer. The result of such is sustainability, in environmental and economic terms, which provides consistency and reliability of playing surface, budget and minimal impact on the environment.

The information on the site is available, free of charge, to anyone, anywhere – which should help enlighten golfers on the technical demands of course management. It is certainly a tool the Course Manager or responsible Committee can use to educate their members.

Convincing golfers that “green is not, necessarily, great” remains, probably, the greatest challenge we face in terms of promoting sustainable course management.

By registering to the site, golf clubs can work through the checklists which are found at the foot of many pages of text in five main sections; Management, Greenkeeping, Environment, Planning and Development, Advice and Research.

After registering, each club is given secure access to their management area. To date, over 670 clubs from 62 countries have registered.

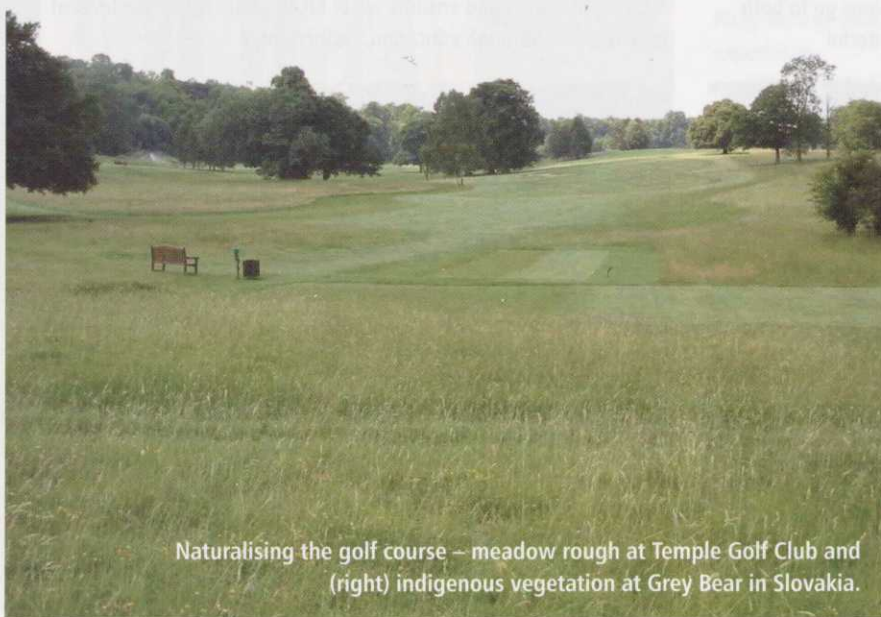
Before setting out on the road to best practice, we strongly advise you read the User Guide to the site, which is available as a downloadable pdf file. This explains how the site works and how the most appropriate individuals within the club can be allocated the task of working through any given section.

Building the case for golf

There is a vast amount of material to work through and documentation to produce to complete the checklists. Some may balk at the size of the task, but this is the beauty of a website – you do this at your own pace and as your resources allow. It is not a race.

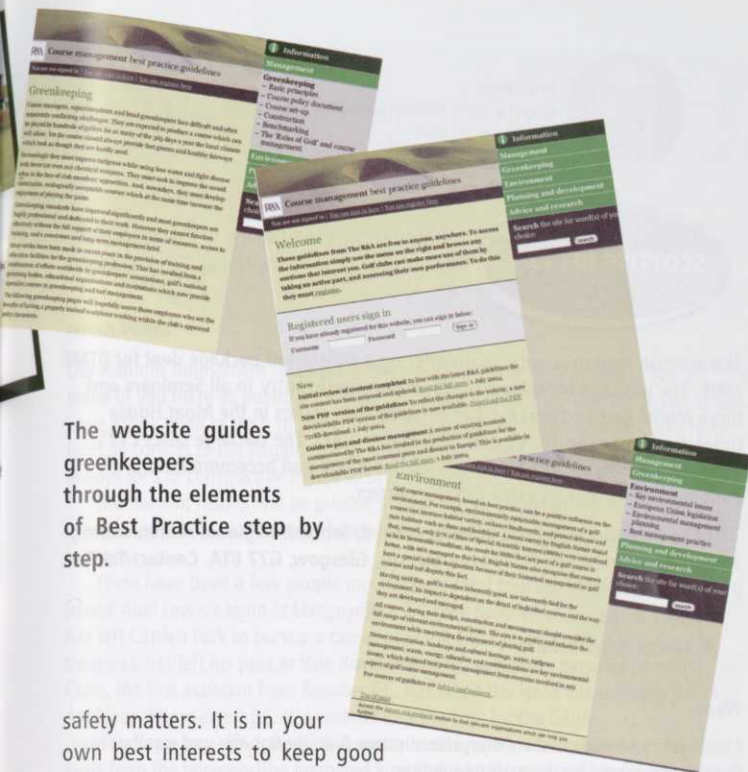
The R&A want to promote the sustainable management of golf courses and this requires planning and long-term commitment. We believe that many courses are already being run on these lines, though there is always room for improvement.

The down side is that relatively few will possess detailed documentation of their programmes and achievements. This is a weakness if we want to persuade environmental organisations of the positive credentials of golf – and a potential liability when it comes to health and



Naturalising the golf course – meadow rough at Temple Golf Club and (right) indigenous vegetation at Grey Bear in Slovakia.





The website guides greenkeepers through the elements of Best Practice step by step.

safety matters. It is in your own best interests to keep good records, not in your head but on paper and organised in such a way that everything is to hand.

The R&A's Best Practice website will help guide you through the paper mountain, highlighting vital documents and the process for their production and development. A vast array of useful contacts can be found in the 'Advice' section of the site, including many organisations that can give practical help in the information gathering exercise.

Clubs completing the checklists for all five sections on the site will receive official recognition of their achievement from The R&A. As for the weakness in the self-regulation of the checklist system, those who believe they can pull the wool over our eyes are only fooling themselves. Environmental legislation will be policed and those paying lip service will be caught out.

However, do not think that working to best practice is all about filling in forms and collecting data - the most vital aspect is in its implementation and for that basic reason it is the greenkeeping fraternity who are the key to promoting best practice. Hopefully, those already working hard to demonstrate the sustainability of golf will be more confident to express their views now they have the full, and very visible, backing of The R&A.

These days it is not enough to believe that golf, generally, operates in an environmentally friendly way – or at least as friendly as any form of land management will allow. Legislators and an increasingly discerning public demand facts and figures, not rhetoric and anecdotal evidence.

We are convinced golf can demonstrate it is a positive contributor to the natural and social environment. Working through the guidelines will help you make your contribution to this end and provide golf with the ammunition to shoot down its detractors and secure the future development of the game in a form that we would recognise.

Do not settle for second best!

Do not shy away from best practice, embrace the concept. It is not something to be afraid of. It is for the good of the environment, club economics, our courses, greenkeepers, golfers and the future of the game itself. Best practice, appropriately applied, is a win:win situation.

Register at www.bestcourseforgolf.org today.



- ▲ Good soil husbandry through compaction and thatch management is crucial.
- ▼ Good practice will result in strong roots and a healthy sward.

