



Golf Environment
Competition

Forget the Myths

Andrew Wood summaries this year's hotly contended BIGGA Environment Competition and dispels the myths that discourage clubs from entering.



Creating markets for recycled resources

Congratulations go to Thorpeness Golf Club, near Ipswich, who in 2005 has joined the list of legendary clubs who have won the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, sponsored by Scotts UK, Syngenta Professional Products, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and Waste-2-Water. For some keen followers of this prestigious award the result could be used to fuel the fire of the most common myth about the competition. This promotes the idea that clubs need to serve a kind of apprenticeship in the competition by entering year on year until it is "their turn".

However though the Thorpeness Club has been in among the regional prize winners for the past six years we can categorically state that the theory that persistence has presidency over performance is nonsense. Anyone who visits the course at Thorpeness and sees just how much work has been carried out in terms of ecological and environmental management over the past year would agree that they are worthy winners.

Greenkeepers at many clubs tell us they don't enter the competition because they feel "they aren't in with a chance of winning". This attitude unfortunately denies many good clubs the chance of winning one of the many prizes on offer. We, as judges, are on the look out for much more than the overall winner, including potential winners of the Best Newcomer Award, five Regional Prizes and a host of clubs that receive 'Highly Commended' status.

Other clubs are chosen specifically on the basis that they may be a strong contender for the 'Best New Initiative' or the 'Best use of a Recycled Product' awards. With these facts in mind the applicants for the 2005 competition were agonisingly whittled down to 27 regional finalists, which Lee Penrose and I felt were well worth a visit.

Another common perception about the BIGGA competition is that if there is a strong club in a region that enters perennially, other clubs within that region may as well not bother. This myth is easily disbanding; firstly there are a number of additional prizes which are awarded without consideration of which region the club comes from - indeed four clubs from within the South East Region have won prizes in 2005.

Secondly, while some clubs are undoubtedly further advanced in terms of ecological management than others the scoring system is set up so that it favours clubs that have made the greatest progress during the past year. Therefore a club which has a course of a high ecological value but that is not working hard to improve it further will more often than not lose out to one of lower ecological value but which might be working harder to improve matters.

After visiting all the finalists it was decision time. This was a difficult exercise due to the high quality of competition for each award and the sheer number of awards to decide upon - nine in total. This large roll of honour is made possible by the generous support from competition sponsors Scotts UK, Syngenta Professional Products, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and Waste-2-Water.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

The competition in the South East region was easily the strongest this year. In the end it was the vast amount of work undertaken out on the course and the dedication of the entire golf club staff that gave Thorpeness Golf Club the title. Course Manager, Ian Willet, and his team have pulled out all the stops this year making large-scale improvements both on and off the course.

Work has included the development and installation of holistic greens clippings composting programme, extensive habitat enhancement - i.e. heather, gorse, grassland management - and a vast improvement in the environmental credentials of the associated clubhouse and hotel. Recording all of the wildlife on the course and the creation of a visitor's wildlife 'scorecard' have assisted in raising the profile of the club locally and now nationwide.

Waste and water management feature as integral parts of all decisions made at the complex with novel initiatives such as the re-useable plastic storage crates instead of traditional disposable ones within the clubhouse kitchen. This makes a small but important contribution to the club's holistic environmental approach.

Rookwood Golf Club came in a close second in this Region, this is a rare species in itself, in that it is owned by the local council and managed by a private company, British Ensign Golf. This club's high ecological credentials are a key part of its marketing strategy, indeed few clubs in the UK promote the greener side of golf in a more positive way.

South Essex Golf Club was a new club to the competition this year and indeed a club that none of the STRI's ecology team had visited before. It was therefore very exciting to add a new name to the growing list of clubs carrying out work which would convince any sceptic that golf courses can, if managed correctly, have a great ecological benefit. The creation of the 'South Essex Environmental Development Strategy' within the golf club gives real focus and definition to holistic environmental management and make the club well deserving of the 'Best New Entrant' award.



L-R, Vic Barnard, Stephen Blake and Stuart McDowell, happy with the progress of Rockwood Golf Club's composting programme



Proof of a successful environmental project as a young Badger is spotted foraging for food



Great crested newt breeding pond at Caldy Golf Club

NORTHERN ENGLAND

Another new entrant to the competition won the Northern Region title. Caldy Golf Club's entry, compiled by Carl Crocher, Course Manager, impressed the judges from day one. The environmental course policy document gives real cognisance to the sound ecological management of this important coastal site, recognising the value of the course for important wildlife species, such as great crested newt.

The development of a new rough grassland creation and management strategy combined with the re-introduction of the rare but important western gorse were also projects which set this club aside from the rest of the pack.

MIDLANDS

The progress at the Notts Golf Club (Hollinwell) continues at pace through a strong team effort between Phil Stain, Course Manager, and the Club's Green's Committee, Chaired by Ian McLachlan. Tree thinning remains the biggest ecological management task for the club. This work is



Creation of one of five giant hibernacula (hibernation chambers) in land cleared of trees at Notts Golf Club. These are constructed by burying sections of cut trees and brushings with one end being left open at the south side of the mound

to some extent aided by the flock of Hebridean sheep that remain on parts of the course to prevent the invasion of birch saplings in areas of heath previously cleared of trees.

Heather restoration continues although a Koro field top-maker has been found to produce much better results than the scarifier used previously. Off the course improvements have been made in terms of composting, recycling of waste and energy saving in the clubhouse.



The state of the art irrigation system installed at Bath Golf Club will reduce water usage dramatically

SOUTH WEST ENGLAND AND WALES

At Bath Golf Club the Course Manager, Andy Boyce, and his team have got an excellent long term management plan in place to further enhance this already outstanding course. The grassland rough in some parts of the course has been improved to such an extent that the National Trust are now bailing the vegetation following cutting.

The bales are then spread on other local National Trust sites with the aim of increasing the diversity of wild flowers species to the same high standard of the golf club.



Thorpeness' extensive environmental programme earned the club the overall winner award

SCOTLAND

In Scotland it was Brighthouse Bay Golf Club that took the regional prize for the second year running. The golf club and associated caravan site have an environmental policy that is second to none.

From the installation of solar panels through to the information leaflets on the golf course to the management of grasslands for their butterfly and bird interest, this club truly considers the ecological impact of every operation. The club also support numerous other environmental accolades including the David Bellamy Conservation award (GOLD - 10 years running!), the Green Tourism Award and are currently in the process of applying to the Scottish Golf Environmental Excellence Award.

Brighthouse Bay Golf Club is a great example of a small club which has good credentials and commitment. Through entering the BIGGA environment competition for the last three years its work has been recognised and it has won two prestigious awards and £1000 prize money.



Colour coded recycling bins at Machrihanish Golf Club, one of the Scottish Clubs to receive 'Highly Commended' status in 2005



Ecological information sign erected by green staff at South Essex Golf Club

If your club deserves recognition for carrying out similar work, then don't be put off entering by the final myth about the competition which is that the entry form is a hassle to get hold of and is too long and laborious to fill in.

Well, there may have been an element of truth up to and including the 2005 competition but the good news is that for the 2006 competition there will be a new streamlined and simplified entry form. What's more, the new form will be included with the January 2006 issue of Greenkeeper International Magazine.

So with the negative myths about the competition dispelled, the easier entry guaranteed and the prizes as good as ever for 2006 get your entry form in and claim the credit you deserve!

CATEGORIES, WINNERS AND PRIZES

Overall winner - Thorpeness Golf Club - £2,000 & A Scott's Weather Master Station

Regional winners

- Scotland - Brighthouse Bay Golf Club - £500
- Northern - Caldry Golf Club - £500
- Midlands - Notts (Hollinwell) Golf Club - £500
- South East - Rookwood Golf Club - £500
- South Wales - Bath Golf Club - £500

Best Newcomer - South Essex Golf Club - £500

Most Impressive Initiative - Notts (Hollinwell) Golf Club - £500

Best use of Recycled Products - The Berkshire Golf Club - £500