



ARTIFICIAL TEES WINNING PLAUDITS ACROSS ESSEX

Maintaining tees and driving practice areas all year round to a high standard is an increasing problem faced by greenkeepers and course managers up and down the country. This problem is now being tackled head on by a number of golf clubs across Essex who have decided on a synthetic solution to their problem. Chris Bassett recently visited three golf clubs in Essex to find out how this problem is being solved.

Members and visitors to Rochford Hundred, Ballards Gore and Cannons Brook golf courses in Essex, are now benefiting from a major upgrading of their winter tees following the installation of over 40 tees, all supplied by Kent firm Active Leisure Contracts.

The first course in the region to have Active Leisure's Tee Turf installed some four years ago was Rochford Hundred Golf Club. Rochford Hundred is definitely a unique club in more than one way. The term 'hundred' was an area to raise 100 men in case of strife, but this is not the complete definition. In King Edgar's reign in 973AD, areas of land were divided into 'hundreds' consisting of several villages controlled by 100 men.

In 1896 the club moved from Southchurch to the meadows of Rochford Hall. In 1924 James Braid and J.H.Taylor, together with the renowned golf course architect Frederick Hawtree were invited to redesign the course. Additional land was then obtained raising the acreage to 98 and the end result is largely the course that is played on today – 6,300 yards from the white tee's compared with the previous 4,010 yards.

The decision to have artificial tees installed came from Course Manager, David Rand, who was intrigued by the idea of having a low maintenance tee option during the winter allowing players to play all year round.

"We've learnt as we've gone along" commented

David, "We've had no problems with the flat tees but the raised tees have sunk a little as they have been built with railway sleepers surrounding the area, but that was nothing to do with the mat itself, just how we built the platform."

David continued: "As long as you maintain them – fill them up with infill from time to time, ensure that they are regularly brushed and treat the occasional weed, then they are absolutely fine."

David currently has eight artificial tees and if he could, would have a full 18 installed. "I'm not quite sure on the actual life span of the tees, but they seem absolutely fine after four years – in fact they just get better the longer they've been here! If we could, I'd like to have all 18 holes with the artificial tee. It would certainly lighten the load on our natural tees during the winter and help keep all holes open during the wetter months."

It was in fact the success of this course that led to the nearby Ballards Gore club installing the same system. Ballards Gore Golf Club is an 18 hole course situated two miles from Rochford and is set in 100 acres of Essex countryside. Being one of the longest courses in Essex, 6974 yards with a par of 73, the course offers a truly impressionable and challenging game of golf. The club, now 18 years old, was recently bought by Julian Innell and a huge investment made in upgrading all aspects of the course.

One major problem faced by the club is that the course was built on a clay soil so drainage has always been poor during the wetter months making it difficult to keep tees open all year round. "We wanted to give golfers as good a surface as they could possibly play off throughout the year – both in the dry summer months and in the wet winter months" commented Iain Evans, the Club Secretary.

The decision was made to install artificial tees for all 18 holes giving full coverage on the course

and keeping members playing all year round. The first artificial tee was installed in January 2007, with the completion of installations in October the same year. Members then started playing off them from November 2007 in their entirety once they had had some time to 'settle in'.

"We wanted to give golfers the opportunity to play all year round which wasn't possible with natural tees" continued Iain, "we looked at the different products available, but it wasn't until we spoke to some local clubs who had already installed the TeeTurf some time ago and then invited us to their club to look at how their tees were performing that we decided that TeeTurf was the right option for us. We then contacted ALC who were local to us and very informative."

General feedback from both the greenkeepers and players has been very positive. The greenkeepers time is now concentrated on making sure that the rest of the course is in tip-top condition as no high maintenance of the tees is needed. The only maintenance needed is to make sure that infill levels of sand and rubber crumb are kept topped-up and to ensure that no weeds are growing within the surface. "The feedback that we've received back from our members is that the new tees are great. They accept tee pegs and also allow balls to be played directly off the surface. The mat actually reacts very similar to that of a natural tee if you take a divot. However, members have said that they prefer playing on them once they have been 'worn in' slightly which only takes a little time for the fibres to flatten off" commented Iain.

The last course visited was Canons Brook. Situated within 112 acres of mature rolling countryside, the 18 hole, 6769 yard, par 73 championship course makes excellent use of the surrounding landscape and its numerous natural and man-made hazards and beautiful features. Designed by the legendary Sir Henry Cotton, whose



philosophy was to create a championship course with very little rough, but incorporating many bunkers and large undulating greens and matured over 40 years, it presents a truly engaging golf experience with lots of variety.

Mark Paxton, the Course Manager, first became aware of the artificial tees at Dyrham Park Golf Club where he previously worked before becoming Course Manager at Canons Brook. Dyrham Park had installed a similar product from Huxley Golf to Active Leisure's TeeTurf. When Mark became Course Manager at Canons Brook and the need for artificial tees arose, he instantly thought back to his days at Dyrham Park. He made some enquiries and then looked around at similar products. After coming across TeeTurf, he contacted Active Leisure Contracts for a sample and finding the price more competitive to other suppliers, the decision was made after funding from the club via its members was made.

"We made the tees raised where possible" commented Mark "This reduces debris being brought onto them by machine wheels, grass clippings etc. It's also easier to level them up rather than putting them into the ground which isn't level. Some tees have been positioned in front of the natural tees as you couldn't have a raised 'box. For example, our 15th hole tee has been sunk into the ground so there is no obstruction to golfers. Where we can build frames and have raised tees, we have. Aesthetically, the raised tees look better although it is cheaper to set them into the ground."

Used when the weather conditions become cooler, slowing down the grass growth and therefore unable to repair, the artificial tees come into their own. "Ideally, because the artificial tees are so good, golfers can come off the natural tees while the tee grass is still growing and that then gives them enough time to start to regenerate before the winter. What happened in the past was that

we left players playing on the natural tees as long as we could which was obviously damaging the grass during the wetter months, causing us to be unable to repair the divots. Come spring when the weather starts to improve, we carried out our renovation programme and the tees just didn't have enough time to recover. The beauty about using the Tee Turf is that we ensure players come off the natural tees earlier while there is still growth which gives the greenkeepers more time to make sure the perfect tee is ready for spring."

Before the club had TeeTurf, the greenkeepers would make sure that golfers used a traditional winter tee 1m x 1m in size. Players didn't like playing off them, so inevitably they wouldn't be used and left on the natural tees as long as possible which gave the club problems with renovation works later on.

"That was one reason why I changed all the short holes first as they take the most wear with divots being knocked out. Players come off the natural tees and use the artificial ones first. We've kept the artificial tees as close to the yardage as possible so there is no disadvantage using them. The idea is once we've installed artificial tees at all the holes, we'd have a measured new course for the winter months, a new course that players can still run competitions on all year round."

Normally as soon as players come off the natural tees, the competitions are finished for the year, as the previous winter tees shortened the yardage of the course by around 100 yards. This has seen approximately 60 new members joining the club during the winter.

"We get a lot of positive comments from the players that they love playing on them as they can continue to play golf during the wetter winter months. Because of the success that we've had, it's my idea to have a full 18 artificial tees."

Active Leisure Contracts have seen a significant increase in sales of all weather tees over the last

few years. "TeeTurf offers a solution to courses that suffer with heavy or wet conditions that would normally mean closure during the wetter months" says Andrew Baylis, MD of ALC, "maintenance costs will also be reduced while still providing a tee which is popular with players."

While some companies continue to sell artificial turf as a 'no maintenance' alternative to natural turf, this is not strictly true. Yes they are low maintenance, but that's not exactly no maintenance is it? Mark Paxton explains: "We've never had any problems with the actual TeeTurf material or with the tee 'pulling up' once it has been down - in fact, the longer it has been down, the better it seems to get. The only maintenance that we have to carry out is that we ensure that the infill is always topped up. We also get a problem with weeds on some of the tees which are positioned close to the natural tees which are irrigated. Obviously, grass clippings get on to the tee and because they are moist, it's ideal breeding conditions. We've started to use a product called 'Casoron G' from Scotts Professional which is a granule residual weed killer. We just spread the granules all over the tee which kills all of the grass off."

Available material only or installed in sizes to suit most requirements, TeeTurf is designed for permanent installations allowing all year round use, as a replacement to natural tees in shaded and wet locations or as a seasonal alternative to grass tees to help spread wear and tear and reduce maintenance costs.

For further information, please contact:
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or visit www.teeturf.com