

PUTTING THE ENVIRONMENT FIRST

Scott MacCallum visits 2008 Environment Competition winner Caldy and discovers a club where environmental management is on every agenda



FEATURE



When Caldy Golf Club was announced as winner of the 2008 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, sponsored by Ransomes Jacobsen, Scotts, Syngenta and Golf Monthly, it was the culmination of a dream, not to mention a lot of hard work, for Course Manager, Carl Crocher.

Carl had first entered the competition while at Orsett Golf Club, in Essex, and when he arrived on the Wirral six years ago he found, in Head Greenkeeper, Ian Farrall, a real comrade-in-arms when it came to environmental work allowing the club to move forward at apace.

"At Orsett we'd done some good work with the STRI's, Bob Taylor, and we carried on doing the same sorts of things when I came up here," said Carl.

And it would be fair to say that what has been achieved at Caldy more than marks them down as very worthy Environment Competition Champions.

"We won the Northern Region Award in 2005 and the feedback then was that if we could bring the clubhouse side of things on board we could go even further and not be just also-rans. Our Secretary/Manager, Gail Copple, got on board and made real improvements in the clubhouse," explained Carl, adding that giving environmental issues higher priority and organising yourselves slightly differently was the key.

"We have put our glass recycling processes in place and it was just a case of making a few phone calls. The services are out there at little or no cost to the club if you just take the trouble to investigate," he said.

The on-course work has been extensive with tree management, heather regeneration, and a new reed bed at the forefront, but everything the Caldy team does has environmental considerations.

The Award presentation during Harrogate Week reinforced that commitment.

"I was accompanied by a Past Captain and R&A member who, without any prompting, turned

to me and said that we had to kick on from here. Also BIGGA Vice Chairman, Paul Worster, Course Manager at past winner Minchinhampton Golf Club told us how much the club had moved forward after winning the competition."

Carl has managed to acquire a couple of nicknames at this last two golf clubs which tie in to his tree management strategies.

"When I was at Orsett I was known as Chainsaw Massacre – they even got me a sweatshirt with that on it – but here I'm only known as Chopper, as I haven't been quite so aggressive, but then we haven't needed to be."

Carl took members on course walks to explain the philosophy of tree management to back up the presentations he did in the clubhouse. One of the areas he concentrated on was most apparent from the clubhouse window.

"One of the club's main assets is the estuary but you couldn't see it from the clubhouse because of the Corsican Pine growing on a bank, while there was a big belt of Scots Pine that had been planted



The Caldly Team with Ian Farrall, far left.

to shield an old tip. That tip is now grassed over and is a conservation area itself so the requirement for the pines has now gone."

The common flaw of planting trees and then expecting them to flourish perfectly with no on-going

he said, adding that he knows of clubs where the policy is written in stone that trees should not be touched.

"Conservation not preservation should be the adage," he explained.

"The work was carried out in 2000, the wettest year on record, and many members thought we'd completely lost the course. However, due to the strong character of the Captain, and particularly the then Green Chairman, Tom Dickinson, they carried on not finishing a job they had expected to complete until July/August, when it had been scheduled for completion in March/April, before the main golf season. But a golf course is a fantastically regenerative place and if people were to go out there today they'd struggle to see where the drains are," said Carl, who although not at the club when the work was done has certainly benefited from it.

"That system is the foundation of so many of the things we've done since. For example, we've been able to carry out winter work when before it would have been to wet and I know that whatever we are doing we are never more than 15 metres from a drain," said Carl, looking back at a project which featured in the May 2002 edition of Greenkeeper International.



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Course Manager, Carl Crocher

maintenance is something Carl has seen.

"The pines hadn't been thinned out in 30 years and you can't expect to plant even the correct species and have them manage themselves,"

The club made a huge breakthrough around the turn of the century when it addressed a chronic waterlogging problem and spent around £300,000 putting in a comprehensive drainage system.



Bunker work at Caldy

One of the major innovations introduced in the last two years has been the club's reed bed which they developed in conjunction with the Environment Agency.

"Our reed bed was originally designed to drain into the estuary but the Environment Agency were nervous about it as it is a SSSI and a Special Bird Site. We decided, therefore, to insert a loop and recycle the water back to our sheds for washing purposes. I believe we were the first club in the country to do this and I think it was one of the main reasons for us getting the Award. It has made a massive difference to the club. Also, we had the enjoyment of doing the work ourselves while the club saved money."

As he had done when talking to Phil Stain, at Hollinwell Golf Club, several Course Managers have contacted Carl to ask about the reed bed, taking advantage of the vast amount of knowledge and experience that is at the fingertips of any BIGGA member who just cares to pick up a phone or access the website.

"It's been nice having guys ring us up out of the blue to ask questions and we try to help however we can."

The tee building and bunker renovation programmes are other areas where the environment is considered and Caldy saves money.

"We have tee building and bunker renovation programmes under way and we bought a new turf cutter which follows contours much better than our old one to enable us to re-cycle more turf than we had previously been able to do.

"Two years ago we saved between £1,500 and £1,700 worth of turf when we built three

new tees and that in itself paid for half of the turf cutter and again this winter we have saved another £1,000 worth. Having the right tools for the job is very important to the club and that investment in machinery pays off all the time.

"You can go out and aerate greens when the conditions are right, or do a top dressing pass in two and a half hours and disruption to members is minimal while it saves us time which can be spent on other jobs."

The bunker programme sees around a dozen bunkers being rebuilt or added each winter.

"We had six new USGA spec greens built several years ago and the bunkering which went with them wasn't particularly sympathetic to what was already at Caldy, which is a James Braid design," explained Carl.

"The new bunkers were much more Americanised, with big shapes and lots of sand, and we are a windy course with a lot of sand blow," said Carl.

The club decided to create a Caldy template for a bunker so that new bunkers would blend in with the old.

"We create a revetted shape for a bunker but only bringing the revetting up as high as we can bury with the sand. What that gave us is a solid wall to pull soil over and create firm mounding ready for turf. It means we build much smaller bunkers in keeping with Braid's originals but they also gather the ball making them just as good a strategic challenge as before and we're able to mow right up to the edge. They are connected to the existing drainage."

The cost benefits are there to be seen.

"Some of the bunkers built with the USGA greens required 25 tonnes of sand to fill them. That came down to three or four for the new models while in 2003-04 our top up was amounting to 50 or 60 tonnes a year, now we are down to under 20 tonnes a year and that will come down even more when we've completed the whole programme. With the cost of aggregates, which is not likely to come down, that is a significant saving," said Carl, who added that the course will ultimately have eight bunkers more than originally following the work.

Several years ago Carl heard that Purdis Heath Golf Club had bought a polytunnel with their winnings from the Environment Competition and thought it was such a good idea that, given similar circumstances, he would like one too.

"I thought it was a great idea and we are looking at sourcing one now. It would need to be substantial – eight to 10 metres – and we could grow our own shrubs and continue with our programme of growing gorse and heather from seed."

Another beneficiary of the prize is Ian, who Carl had put in charge of the environmental work at the club.

"Ian lives three and a half miles away, near Royal Liverpool Golf Club, at the top end of the Wirral Way and we've bought him a bike so he can get to and from work in an environmentally friendly manner. It takes him 17 to 18 minutes but with the new bike that time will come down," said Carl.

It's that sort of commitment that has marked Caldy Golf Club down as a worthy winner of the 2008 competition.