

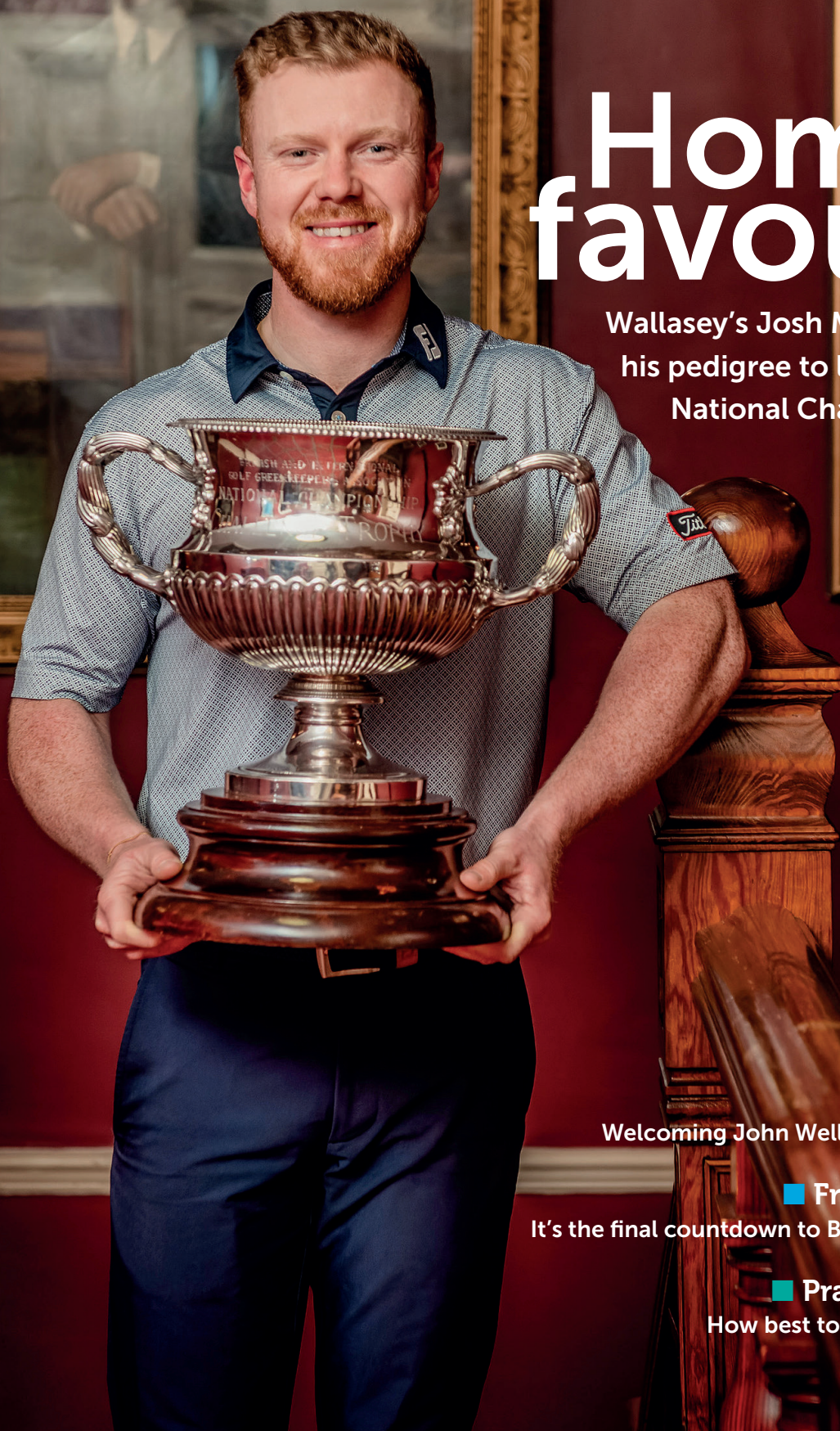


Inform • Innovate • Inspire December 2025 • £6.50

Greenkeeper International

Home favourite

Wallasey's Josh McMahon shows
his pedigree to land the BIGGA
National Championship



Member Interest

Welcoming John Wells MG as our next president

From Your Association

It's the final countdown to BTME – see you next month

Practical Greenkeeping

How best to deal with autumn diseases



ACCUPRO[®] 360ST

Precision performance for an even spread

A professional rotary spreader designed for precision and reliability. With **SmartSpread™** technology and a durable stainless-steel frame, it ensures even application and long-lasting performance.

Contents

December 2025



The magazine for BIGGA members
Greenkeeper International exists for you, our members. Since 1987 BIGGA has helped thousands in golf greenkeeping to progress their careers, find inspiration and get involved in our varied and vibrant community. This magazine aims to reflect the passions and preoccupations of our members and we'd like you to be involved. Please drop us a line, send us a picture or post on our social media pages.

Contact us Email

Membership enquiries, including changes of address
membership@bigga.co.uk
Letters and editorial enquiries
info@bigga.co.uk

Post

BIGGA, Coxwold House, Easingwold
Business Park, Stillington Road,
Easingwold, York YO61 3FB

Phone

Membership services 01347 833 800

Social

[f golfgreenkeepers](#)
[X @BIGGALtd](#)
[@bigga_hq](#)

The BIGGA team

Chief Executive Officer Jim Croxton
Chief Financial Officer Steve Wragg
Head of Membership Scott Reeves
Editorial Assistant Lorna Taylor
Design & Brand Executive
Libbie Waddleton
Head of Commercial & Marketing
Lauren Frazer
Commercial Manager Gavin Rees

Publishers

Greenkeeper International is published on BIGGA's behalf by 18Players.
For editorial enquiries, email Dan Murphy: d.murphy@18players.com

ISSN: 0961-6977

© 2025 British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association Limited



16



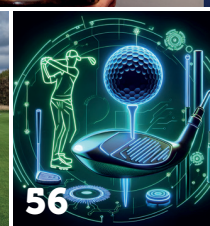
26



30



46



56

First Cut

07 • CGCS recommends pay rise

The latest review proposed a 4.8% increase for key roles in golf

08 • Greenkeeper's run to BTME

Jack Percival aims to complete the 300-mile charity run from Surrey to Harrogate in seven days

From Your Association

15 • The Employment Rights Bill

The team at HR Services Scotland explain the possible impact of new workplace legislation

16 • Photography winners revealed

View some of the winning images that will feature on the 2026 calendar

19 • From Source to Course

Please take the time to complete this survey on water usage to help us understand the current situation

Members & Careers

26 • Meet the incoming President

John Wells MG is honoured to become BIGGA President in 2026

30 • BIGGA National Championship

We speak to winner Josh McMahon and the greenkeepers who helped prepare the courses for the event

Practical Greenkeeping

42 • Autumn disease pressure

Why a changing climate and reduced chemical control have created the perfect conditions for disease

46 • Lessons from Black Water Links

How the new Polish course has integrated design and technology

56 • The golf course of the future

We look at how our golf courses may be managed in a future with AI, data and automation at the forefront



Contents may not be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission. Return postage must accompany all materials submitted if return is requested. No responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials. The right is reserved to edit submissions before publication. Although every care will be taken, no responsibility is accepted for loss of manuscripts, photographs or artwork. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Association, and no responsibility is accepted for such content, advertising or product information that may appear. Circulation is by subscription. Subscription rate: UK £60 per year, Europe and Eire £75, Rest of the World £100. The magazine is also distributed to BIGGA members, golf clubs, local authorities, the turf industry, libraries and central government.



We are committed to the continual professional development of our members, working with the leading bodies in golf for the good of the game.

BIGGA's activities on a national and regional level are underpinned by the generosity of our industry partners and supporters. BIGGA's various member benefits, learning and development opportunities and other activities are made possible due to the ongoing commitment shown by these companies, organisations and individual donors. From our supporters through to our national patrons and partners, our thanks go to them all for their dedication to BIGGA and its members.



BIGGA
Partner

RAIN BIRD



Individual Contributors:

Andrew Campbell | Greg Evans | Frank Newberry | Jon Kiger | Richard McGlynn



BIGGA

Premium Partner



REESINK
Turfcare



JOHN DEERE



ORIGIN
AMENITY SOLUTION



ICL syngenta®

BARONESS®



BERNHARD



BERNHARD

ACADEMY



BIGGA

Supporter



agrovista
amenity

GRUNDFOS



envu™

ISEKI

The Aquatrols®
Company



Huxley Golf

Premier All-Weather Surfaces for Golf
Proud to be an Employee Ownership Trust since 2020



CLEREGOLF

Wiedenmann®

ECO
BUNKER
build it once

Avoncrop
Amenity Products



COURSE PROTECTION WITHOUT COMPROMISE

- 6 Angled spikes grip the grass for a stable surface
- Spikes leave small fine holes to aid aeration
- Synthetic turf with a fairway feel for confident strikes
- Lightweight and portable for easy use and storage
- The go-to strike mat for iconic golf courses around the world



THE MAT THE MEMBERS LOVE TO USE



REGISTER FOR A TRADE ACCOUNT

Scan the QR code to set up an online trade account in seconds and start enjoying trade-only prices and next-day delivery

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
enquiries@spurkgolf.co.uk



First Cut

All you need to know from around our industry

- Greenkeeper Jack Percival plans fundraising 300-mile run ahead of BTME
- Sustainable course management book to support prostate cancer research



Committee for Golf Club Salaries recommends 4.8% pay increase for 2026

The latest review by the Committee for Golf Club Salaries (CGCS) has recommended that salaries should rise by 4.8% from next year.

The CGCS, which provides guidance to employers and employees on remuneration for key roles in golf, said the proposed uplift reflects the balance between rising costs for clubs and financial pressures on employees.

In announcing its recommendations for 2026, the committee said it had taken into account "the inverse" shift in inflation compared with the previous year. While inflation has not returned to the highs of September 2023, it has risen steadily, with signs of levelling off.

However, with regular pay inflation at its lowest level for two years, the

CGCS warned that the gap between entry-level and experienced staff pay continues to narrow as National Living Wage increases take effect.

The committee noted: "The issue of highly qualified and experienced staff being caught up in terms of salary by those enjoying the rise in the NLW still remains a significant problem."

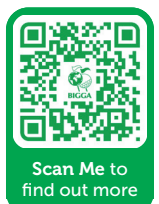
The 4.8% recommendation aims to ensure pay rates remain competitive in what the CGCS describes as a challenging recruitment and retention environment.

It also reflects the committee's view that both employers and employees are facing increased costs, from operational overheads for clubs to household expenses for staff.

In addition to the proposed pay rise, the CGCS is also encouraging clubs to add a further 2% to the overall package for key staff, through non-salary benefits, such as private health insurance, a defined budget for professional development and a robust governance structure that supports staff wellbeing and progression.

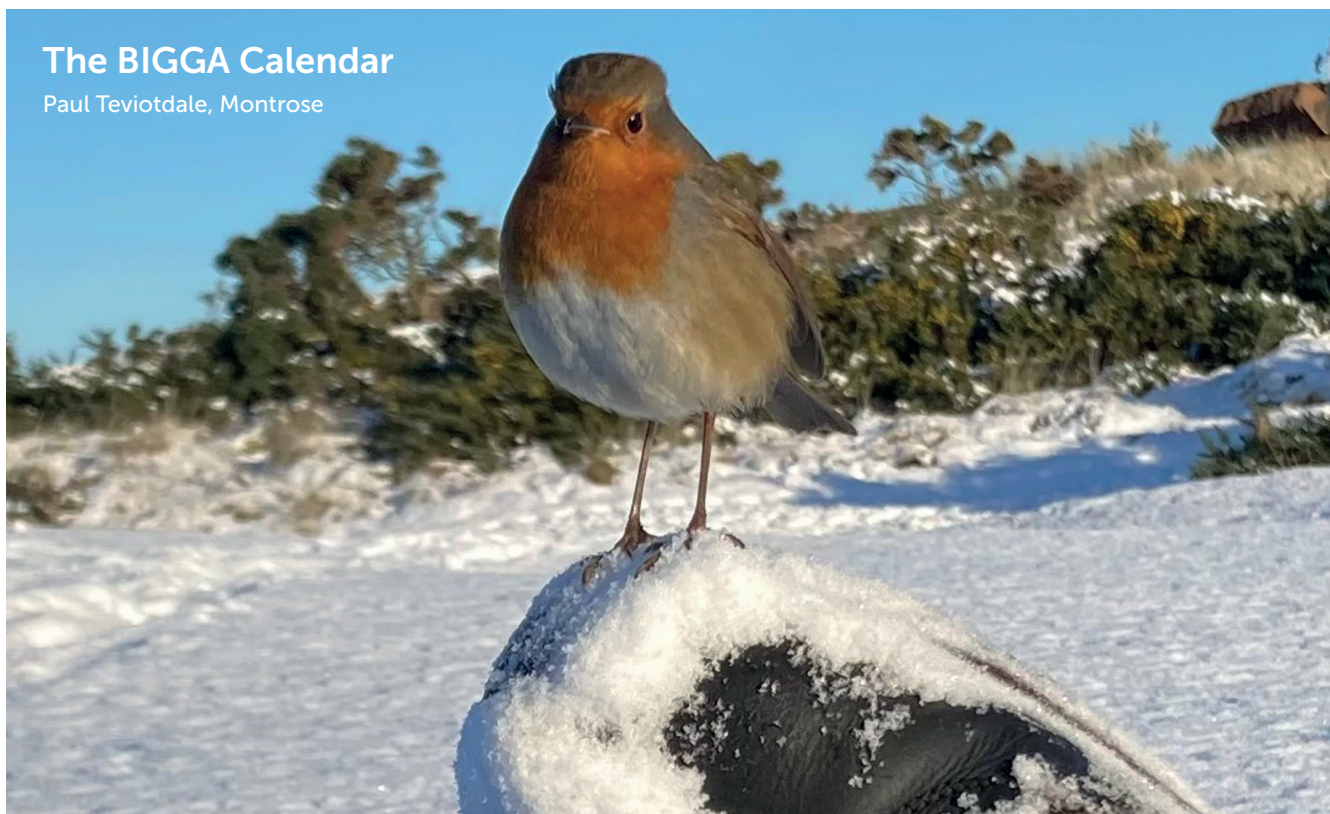
The CGCS believes this broader approach to remuneration will help improve staff satisfaction and retention:

"These factors all contribute to giving employees the sense that the business in which they work is genuinely committed to staff wellbeing." **GI**



The BIGGA Calendar

Paul Teviotdale, Montrose



300 Miles for Hope – the road to BTME '26

A greenkeeper who walked 450 miles from Epsom to Glasgow is lacing up his running shoes for another epic feat of endurance to raise awareness around mental health.

In January, Jack Percival, senior greenkeeper at Royal Automobile Club, will run 300 miles - seven days of consecutive ultramarathons - from the Surrey venue to Harrogate Convention Centre in time for BTME.

And he is doing it all to promote and raise funds for two causes close to his heart: Percy's Homeless Hub and the Greenkeepers Benevolent Fund.

Jack founded Percy's Homeless Hub

to support vulnerable people in his community with food, shelter and rehabilitation opportunities, and he has been a long-time advocate for opening up conversations around suicide and mental health within the turfcare industry.

His efforts have previously been recognised with BIGGA's Outstanding Contribution Award.

"This run is about reminding people that no matter how dark things feel, there is always a way forward, and you are never truly alone," he said.

"If you can, please follow the journey, share the message or donate

to help me make a difference one mile, one story, one life at a time."

This latest test follows his 2024 journey on foot from Epsom to Ibrox Stadium – a 450-mile trek that raised more than £11,000 for his charity and changed his perspective on life.

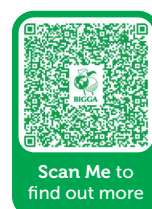
That walk came a year after Jack's own mental health crisis, when he was admitted to hospital following a suicide attempt.

He has since dedicated himself to using his story to inspire hope in others.

As he runs north towards Harrogate, Jack plans to stop at golf clubs along the route to meet fellow greenkeepers and supporters, sharing experiences and promoting the message that nobody has to face their struggles alone.

Through his incredible fundraising efforts, Jack continues to show that the darkest moments can be transformed into powerful opportunities to help others.

Please scan the QR code if you would like to donate to Jack's 300 Miles for Hope challenge. **GI**





What's on this month

Dates for your diary

2 December

Essex Section Turkey Trot sponsored by ICL — Orsett
Essential skills to navigate difficult conversations —
Bernhard Academy (online)

3 December

Central Scotland Annual Gathering of Members —
Leven Links

4 December

East of England Turkey Trot — Blankney
East Midlands Turkey Trot — Kilworth Springs
North East of Scotland Annual Gathering of Members
— Portlethen

9 December

South West Turkey Trot — Ogbourne Downs

10 December

Midlands Turkey Trot — Harborne
Scotland Annual Awards — Dunblane Hydro

11 December

BIGGA D&C Turkey Trot — Trevoise

15 December

South Wales Turkey Trot — Pyle & Kenfig

16 December

Making bold, confident decisions that stick —
Bernhard Academy (online)

18 December

BB&O Turkey Trot 2025 — Newbury & Crookham
Sussex Section Turkey Trot sponsored by Mitchell's
Groundcare Ltd — West Hove

19 December

Mid Anglia Christmas Turkey Trot 2025 — Royston

A greenkeeper's best friend – Toffee



Owner: Oliver Pate (deputy head
greenkeeper)
Course: Worksoop
Age: 6
Breed: Staffie x Rottweiler x
German shepherd

Favourite treat: The M&S treats Mo, our office
administrator, keeps in her drawer

Favourite spot on the course: The woods running
along the 15th

Naughtiest moment: She's never naughty, although
she does have selective hearing

My dog is happiest when: Chasing squirrels, sleeping
after exercise, eating tea or in the company of
humans



BIGGA Regional Patrons 2025

Our programme of local and regional
events is supported by regional patrons,
whose generosity helps create
opportunities for BIGGA members.



BIGGA

Regional Patron 2024/25



STRATHBOGIE
SCOTLAND



BIGGA

Section Patron 2024/25



RURAL
-TRAINING & CONSULTANCY-



Head to the BIGGA website
for more information about
local activities near you



Malcolm Peake is offering fellow BIGGA members a chance to own a piece of golf's environmental history, while supporting a cause close to his heart.

The former chair of greens at Temple Golf Club is selling the last remaining copies of his 2005 book *A Natural Course for Golf* to raise funds for Prostate Cancer Research.

Malcolm, who has been treated for prostate cancer since 2016, has around 40 hardback copies left and has already donated £500 to the charity from book sales and proceeds from perennial plants he has grown.

First released through the STRI, the book explores the philosophy and science behind sustainable course management, with contributions from leading figures across the game, including agronomists, architects, administrators and players. Sir Michael Bonallack, Nick Faldo, Colin Montgomerie and Peter Thomson are just a few of the notable names to lend their support.

Malcolm said the book grew from his experiences meeting greenkeepers in various countries around the world.

"It all began quite by chance," he explained. "I'd been travelling a lot, meeting superintendents and course managers around the world – in the US, Australia, New Zealand, Europe – and their views on what golf course maintenance should be were completely different to what many golfers expected."

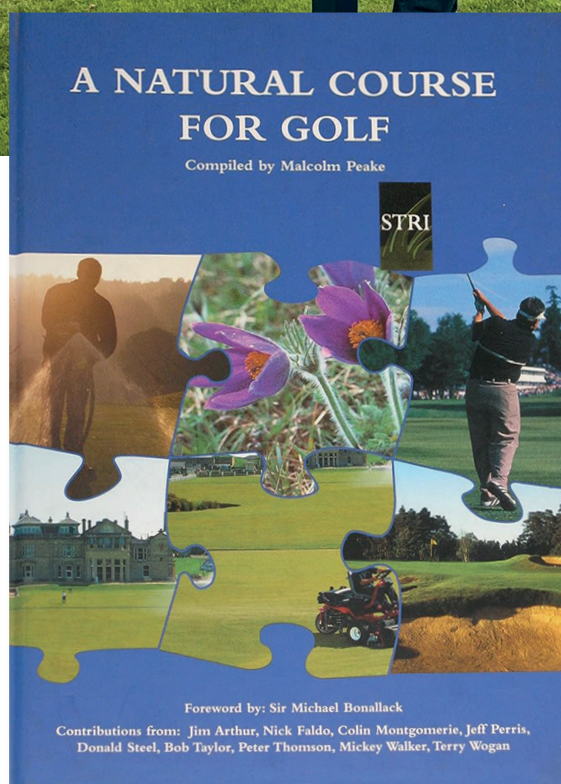
"That contrast fascinated me, and I thought it was worth capturing, so I asked some of the leading people I'd met if they would contribute short essays, and nobody refused or wanted payment. It just grew from there."

The essays collected in the book champion a move away from the heavily fertilised, over-irrigated style that dominated at the time, advocating instead for a more natural, ecological and economical approach. Malcolm's own work at Temple, alongside then Course Manager Martin Gunn, helped to inspire that vision.

Now two decades on from its release, he believes the book's message has only grown stronger. "I think it's more relevant now than ever," he said. "At the time, some people said Temple and the ideas in the book were 20 years ahead of things, and I think that's been proved right."

"When we first talked about reducing water, fertilisers and pesticides, or about encouraging wildlife and natural meadows, people would say, 'This is a golf course, not a wildlife park'. But attitudes have changed completely, and those environmental principles are now central to modern golf course management." **GI**

A Natural Course and a great cause



Those wishing to buy a copy, priced at £19.99 + P&P, and support Prostate Cancer Research, can contact Malcolm directly via email: peakes@hotmail.co.uk

The Ultimate Formation

Build Your Squad. Grow Your Game.

With Avoncrop's bespoke Award range of products.



Award
An Avoncrop Amenity Product

Avoncrop Amenity Products Ltd

Tel: 01344 891730

sales@avoncrop-amenity.com

[@avoncropamenity](https://www.avoncropamenity.com)

www.avoncrop-amenity.com



“The Kress robotic mowers have made everyone’s life much easier. They do a fantastic job and give us the time to do all the other things we normally don’t find time to do.”

John Quinn



Built for the Course. Ready for the Future.

At The Mere Golf Resort and Spa, technology and tradition are working hand in hand thanks to the introduction of Kress RTK robotic mowers. Under Golf Course Manager John Quinn, the club has embraced automation that’s not only maintaining the course to exceptional standards but also freeing up valuable time for long-awaited improvements.

That time saving has already delivered results. A long-discussed upgrade to the 18th hole approach, once just a concept on paper, has now been completed, doubling its size and transforming one of the club’s signature features.

By handling mowing with precision and reliability, the Kress RTK units have allowed Quinn’s team to focus on creativity, detail and enhancements that elevate the entire course experience. What began as an investment in efficiency has become a catalyst for continuous improvement.

“I love them. I think they’re great. This is something I definitely would recommend.” says John.

For golf clubs looking to unlock more potential from their maintenance teams, Kress RTK robotic mowers are proving that automation isn’t just about cutting grass, it’s about creating opportunity.

Speak to your local grounds maintenance machinery dealer today or learn more at **kress.com**

Kress 



From your Association

Representing the greenkeeping community

- View a selection of stunning images set to feature in our 2026 calendar
- What's on offer at the two Breakfast Sessions at BTME in January



BIGGA members selected for 2026

- **Scott Allen, greenkeeper, The Mid Ocean Club** — The 154th Open, Royal Birkdale
- **Brent Downs CGCS MG, director of agronomy, Otter Creek** — Amateur Championship, Royal Liverpool and West Lancashire
- **Jonathan Fisher, head greenkeeper, Ruddington Grange** — AIG Women's Open, Royal Lytham & St Annes
- **Paul Fowkes, course manager, Kilworth Springs** — Walker Cup, Lahinch
- **Scott Fraser, senior greenkeeper, Pannal** — The 154th Open, Royal Birkdale
- **Harry Glover, greenkeeper, Lee Park** — Amateur Championship, Royal Liverpool and West Lancashire
- **Tom Jennings, course manager, Calcot Park** — Women's Amateur Championship, Muirfield
- **Kate Stillwell, course manager, Golf Club of Kópavogur and Garðabær** — AIG Women's Open, Royal Lytham & St Annes
- **Jethro Wilson, head greenkeeper, Bradford Moor** — Women's Amateur Championship, Muirfield
- **Dominic Wright, greenkeeper, Fulford** — The 154th Open, Royal Birkdale

R&A Championship Agronomy cohort for 2026 revealed

The BIGGA members selected for the 2026 R&A Championship Agronomy Programme have been revealed.

Following the success of last year's inaugural cohort, 10 members will once again be embedded within host greenkeeping teams across five of the year's most prestigious events, including The 154th Open at Royal Birkdale and the AIG Women's Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes.

The initiative offers participants the chance to contribute to elite championship preparation, working

alongside The R&A's Championship Agronomy Team and gaining a behind-the-scenes perspective on tournament delivery at the very highest level.

Fulford greenkeeper Dominic Wright, who will join the team at Royal Birkdale, said: "It's an incredible opportunity and such an honour to be placed at The 154th Open. I'm really grateful to be part of something that supports the future of our industry and can't wait to learn, meet new people, and make the most of the experience."

Lee Park's Harry Glover, who will be at

the Amateur Championship, added that it was an exciting opportunity.

"I can't wait to get started," he said.

BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said the success of the first year demonstrated the value of the initiative.

"I'd like to congratulate the 2026 cohort on being selected to continue that legacy. Their involvement represents an outstanding professional development opportunity and a chance to gain unique, first-hand experience at the very highest level of championship preparation." **GI**

The BIGGA National Board comprises the following members who volunteer their time to support the association:
Kevin Fish, Antony Kirwan, Gordon McKie, Peter Moore, Jonny Roberts, Lucy Sellick and Andy Smith
BIGGA President Ronnie Myles BIGGA Chairperson Steven Lloyd

First Green – from pilot to progress



Jenny Bledge highlights the incredible growth of the First Green programme



What started as a pilot event at Harrogate Golf Club back in 2022 has turned into a movement that's inspiring students, teachers and clubs across the country.

So far, 20 First Green events have taken place, inspiring more than 700 young people and involving over 100 BIGGA members. That's an incredible achievement and a real credit to everyone who's helped to make it happen, from small clubs taking part in their first session to larger venues hosting full-scale STEM field trips, with many clubs now on their second or third event. Some are even taking on staff as a result of their involvement.

Each event has helped open young eyes to the amazing variety and science behind greenkeeping.

The feedback has been fantastic. Teachers have told us how valuable it's been to show their students a real-world link between science, maths and the environment, and greenkeepers have spoken about the buzz of sharing their craft and seeing those lightbulb moments happen.

One of my favourite stories came from a school visit where a student announced, "I didn't even know this was a job!". By the second activity, they were already asking how to become a greenkeeper. It's those moments that really capture what First Green is all about – showing young people that courses aren't just places to play golf, but living, breathing classrooms, and that greenkeeping is a genuine

and exciting career path where science, creativity and the outdoors all come together.

The past 12 months have also seen brilliant collaboration within our industry. Many of you have shared ideas, resources and photos that have helped others get started. We've built a great library of articles, FAQs and case studies in Greenkeeper International and on the BIGGA website, so if you're thinking about running your first event or just want to learn more, take a look back through the previous issues. There's loads of practical guidance and inspiration waiting for you.

And if you haven't tuned in yet, our First Green Podcast is the perfect place to start. It's designed as a friendly audio guide to help you plan and run your own event, from those first conversations with schools to activity ideas, safety tips and follow-up suggestions. Each short episode walks you through a different stage of the process, so you can listen on the go and feel confident about taking that next step.

If you'd like to hear more or chat about how First Green could work at your club, come and find me at **BTME on Tuesday at 10:15 in Hall 3, Seminar Theatre B**, where I'll be giving a talk on First Green, sharing some success stories and answering any questions. **GI**

- Get involved by scanning the QR code



What the Employment Rights Bill could mean for greenkeepers



The team at HR Services Scotland explain the possible impact of new workplace legislation

A political stalemate in Parliament over unfair dismissal rights could reshape how golf clubs hire, manage and protect staff. So what does that mean for you as a greenkeeper?

The core issue is the qualifying period for making an unfair dismissal claim. The Government's plan, as outlined in its Plan to Make Work Pay, is to abolish the qualifying service requirement altogether (subject to a probation period). The House of Lords proposed a six-month threshold, but that compromise has not been accepted. In short, the Government remains committed to removing the waiting period entirely.

What would change, and why does it matter on course?

From day one, or very early in employment, workers could potentially challenge a dismissal, provided they are within any probation framework. That is a substantial shift from today, when many staff win unfair dismissal rights only after two years' service.

For clubs, this means greater emphasis on robust probation procedures, precise job expectations,

consistent performance management and airtight evidence in disciplinary matters.

The change could affect hiring decisions, disciplinary actions and even how courses plan for recruitment, safety and staffing continuity, especially during peak seasons when greenkeeping teams are stretched.

What to plan for – and what to do now:

1) Strengthen probation and onboarding

Create a clear probation plan for every new hire with measurable targets (turf quality, maintenance routines, safety compliance). Schedule formal reviews with written feedback at defined intervals.

2) Implement well-documented processes

Review disciplinary and dismissal policies to ensure they are evidence-based, non-discriminatory and consistently applied. Maintain

thorough records of performance discussions, warnings and coaching.

3) Focus on training for employees

Invest in line-manager training on fair procedures, grievance handling and health and safety. Ensure supervisors and managers know how to conduct objective investigations that stand up to scrutiny.

4) Prepare for a potential 2027 implementation

While the bill's final form is not settled, prepare now by aligning policies across the club and keeping key staff informed. Seek regular updates from employment-law experts to stay ahead of changes.

5) Communicate with all members of the team

Be transparent about performance expectations and how any potential changes could work in practice. Provide clear avenues for staff to raise concerns or grievances early.

BIGGA and HR Services Scotland provide every greenkeeper member with access to free help and advice to make your workplace a more professional and positive environment.

Qualified professionals are on hand to assist BIGGA members with any HR problems that arise, with advice just a phone call away | **Call: 0800 652 2610** Email: bigga@hrrservicescotland.co.uk





Charlie's joy after photo competition triumph

Charlie Lacey was "over the moon" after winning the BIGGA Annual Photography Competition sponsored by Syngenta.

The deputy course manager at Camberley Heath claimed the overall prize for his shot taken on a March morning as the team were aerating the tees.

The photo, which captures the 1st tee, fringed by heather, with the light from the rising spring sunshine pouring through the trees, will now feature in the BIGGA and Syngenta 2026 calendar, alongside 11 other outstanding entries.

"I was over the moon about winning," said Charlie. "I take loads of photos around the course and have

been featured in the calendar a few times before, but to be the overall winner is amazing.

"I noticed the sunrise coming through, so I grabbed my phone and tried to frame it with the Erica heather around the tee and the sun breaking through the trees — luckily, I managed to capture it just right."

I managed to capture it just right"

Charlie revealed his whole team were keen on taking pictures, and it was a reminder of what a special environment they get to work in.

He said: "We see the course at times of day most people never do, so it's nice to capture those moments."

Charlie added: "When you work on the course every day, it's easy to forget how beautiful your surroundings are, so looking back at the photos reminds you just how special it is."

The top 12 images were whittled down from 24 finalists following a public vote, with three category winners in addition to the overall winner. **GI**

Learn how to take better pictures with our handy guide



Category Winners



Greenkeeping:
Alex Lungu, Walton Heath

"My photo captures both the beauty of autumnal mornings and also the challenges they bring for the greenkeepers who work tirelessly to maintain such beautiful landscapes, not only for golfers but for everyone who enjoys the outdoors."



Landscape:
Joe Simpson, Ipswich

"The sunrise illuminated the heavily frosted turf, producing a great photo opportunity. It was ideal using the drone to help show the depth of the light rays beaming across the landscape."



Wildlife:
Lee Carratt, Belton Park

"Our work provides us with incredible views and experiences, and I'm delighted to share one through this photo of the common frog, taken on the 16th green at Belton Park Golf Club while changing holes early one morning in May."





The **BIGGA** Picture



With
Jim Croxton, CEO

All eyes on BTME

The countdown to Christmas may be on, but some of us are already looking ahead to a big event next year...

As 2025 draws to a close, I'd like to begin by wishing all our members a very merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. You've earned it.

This year has presented its fair share of challenges, from drought to heavy disease pressure, yet golf continues to thrive, with record-breaking participation levels.

That success is in no small part down to the hard work and professionalism of BIGGA members across the country, who have kept courses in superb condition despite testing circumstances.

As we head into 2026, it's all eyes on BTME. This year promises to be our biggest and most comprehensive yet, and I'd strongly encourage everyone to make the most of the

opportunities on offer. The event will once again provide an unrivalled platform for education, networking and inspiration. Our Continue to Learn programme offers hundreds of hours of professional development, representing exciting opportunities for our members at all levels.

**This year
promises to be
our biggest yet"**

This year we're delighted to introduce some new elements to the line-up in Harrogate. One of the most exciting is the General Manager and Course Manager Symposium in partnership with the GCMA. These

sessions, held across two days, will bring together leaders from both sides of club operations to discuss shared challenges such as water resilience, workforce recruitment and retention, finance, communication and the management of major events.

We are also thrilled to welcome Rhett Evans, CEO of the GCSAA, who will deliver the Wednesday breakfast session. Rhett will share his remarkable experience of scaling Mount Everest and the lessons learned from that extraordinary journey about teamwork, perseverance and leadership that resonate strongly with our industry.

Visitors should also make time for The R&A Clubhouse, where leading experts will host presentations and discussions on key topics shaping the future of golf course management.

BTME 2026 is already shaping up to be a sell-out success, with the exhibition halls packed out. Visitor registrations and education bookings are tracking at record levels, underlining BTME's reputation as one of the premier events for greenkeepers and turf professionals around the world.

It's the perfect way to start the year: a celebration of our profession, a showcase for innovation, and a chance to connect, learn and recharge for the season ahead. I look forward to seeing you all in Harrogate. **GI**



From Source to Course: we need your input



Water use on golf courses is under more scrutiny than ever before and we are asking for your feedback to make a rational case for golf's continued access to this vital resource.

We are urging course managers, general managers and owners to complete the From Source to Course survey in order to provide a better nationwide understanding of the current picture.

During the summer of 2025, the UK and Ireland experienced one of the driest spells on record. This came immediately after an unprecedented period of wet weather, with many months of record rainfall recorded over the past two years.

These extreme climatic

conditions are fast becoming the norm, and they bring a genuine threat to the sustainability of our golf courses. It is clear that many golf facilities are in urgent need of finding long-term, sustainable solutions for water management, including irrigation and drainage.

We must build a strong collaborative relationship with water providers and regulators, and it has become clear that we need to provide them with robust data on current and future usage, sourcing and supply.

We are seeking to ensure that golf courses are viewed, particularly by regulators, as a benefit to the nation's health and the environment, for which we need a far stronger picture

“We must build a strong collaborative relationship with water providers and regulators”

of the current situation, backed by data.

The survey data will be utilised by the governing bodies of golf across the UK and Ireland for the benefit of the industry. Please fill it in as accurately as possible, but be mindful that it is not a test and is not a method of us identifying higher users.

Golf courses differ wildly,

and all provide a valuable resource for our sport.

We simply need to better understand the current situation to accurately represent our challenge and ensure that our game and facilities are protected for the future. **GI**



Your input will help to:

- Build a strong case for the environmental advantage of greenkeeping across all sectors
- Inform future legislation
- Create a real future for course irrigation and drainage

No tool can replace a greenkeeper's wisdom



Andy Smith,
Guardian

No matter how advanced the tools become, human experience still matters most in this profession



After more than four decades in greenkeeping, I've seen our craft transformed – from the days of spades and instinct to the era of sensors, drones and data. Yet even with all this progress, it's still experience and intuition that make the real difference out on the course.

When I began greenkeeping in 1979, our 'technology' amounted to a sharp blade, a steady hand and a reliable barrow. We judged soil moisture by feel, the weather by the sky and turf health by colour and smell.

It was physical work, but it was deeply personal too. You got to know your course – every dip, every patch, every quirk of the greens. The course revealed everything you needed to know if you

were discerning enough to notice.

In those early years, experience was everything. You walked the greens each morning, feeling for softness underfoot or the crunch of drought beneath the surface. You'd dig a small hole, study the roots and make your best call. It

“The final decision still rests with the greenkeeper”

wasn't perfect, but it taught you to understand the turf in a way no gadget ever could.

Fast-forward 40 years and the tools are almost unrecognisable. Sensors now sit beneath the surface, feeding back real-time moisture and temperature data. Drones fly overhead, revealing stress patterns invisible

to the eye. Artificial intelligence pulls together that information – along with weather forecasts and maintenance logs – to suggest when to water, when to hold off, or when to expect a disease outbreak.

These tools save water, cut costs and help meet

power now help deliver consistency and efficiency, freeing up time for the finishing touches that make a course feel right.

Despite all this progress, greenkeeping remains a balance between science and craft. Data can tell you what's happening, but not always why. A sensor might flag dryness, but your eye will spot the compaction that caused it. AI might predict disease, but it's your nose that catches the first hint of trouble on a damp morning.

The best results come from blending data with instinct. Technology can guide us, but experience gives the data its meaning. The tools have changed, but the need for passionate and knowledgeable greenkeepers remains as strong as ever. I am not a robot! **GI**



A stellar line-up for Conference

From a former sniper to the director of agronomy at a Ryder Cup venue, the Conference has it all

When: 19 January, 9am-5pm;

20 January, 9.30am-4.40pm

Where: DoubleTree by Hilton

Harrogate Majestic Hotel & Spa

A stellar list of keynote speakers, including some of the most influential names in the industry, will deliver an unmissable Conference programme at **Continue to Learn 2026**.

The two-day event features sessions typically lasting 40 to 60 minutes and covers a vast range of topics from agronomy, ecology and technology, to leadership, strategy and wellbeing.

With two speaker programmes running adjacent to each other, attendees can select the learning that most closely suits their needs and have the option to move between rooms to maximise their experience.

The list of names who will address the Conference includes Mark Hunt of Prodata Weather Systems, Michigan State University's Dr Thom Nikolai, Kevin Fish of Contemporary Club Leadership, Bethpage State Park Superintendent Andrew Wilson and ex-Royal Marines commando Ross Wilson, now Human Performance Consultant at Constantiam.

While the programme is best suited for those currently in or aspiring towards a managerial role, all are welcome to attend. **GI**



Scan Me to get tickets

A double helping of the BTME Breakfast Session

The programme at BTME 2026 includes two Breakfast Sessions to whet your appetite

When: 20 & 21 January, 8am-9am

Where: Seminar Theatre, Hall 3, Harrogate Convention Centre

The BTME Breakfast Session is a highlight of the programme in Harrogate, and in 2026 there will be two for visitors to attend.

The first session will lift the lid on the behind-the-scenes work that went into presenting the course at Royal Portrush for The 153rd Open Championship and the 2025 AIG Women's Open at Royal Porthcawl.

This session will see The R&A's Sustainable Championship Agronomy team of Adam Newton and Richard Windows share their experiences and learnings from staging these major

events, along with insights from the greenkeepers and other supporters who work to deliver courses for the highest level of golf.

In the second session, GCSAA CEO Rhett Evans will share the lessons he learned while successfully summiting the highest peak on earth, Mount Everest.

Find out how the same principles that allowed Rhett to achieve that momentous feat – purpose, passion, positivity and perseverance – can help you overcome difficulties you may encounter and lead to greater personal and professional growth.

These sessions are free to attend for all visitors and there is no need to book a ticket. **GI**

Welcome to our new members

Aberdovey 12th

Central

George Ratcliffe (APP)

Uttoxeter

Nathan Shayler (AGK)

Frilford Heath

Joseph Howell (AGK)

Boldmere

Henry Gibson (AGK)

Ellis Nugent (AGK)

Melton Mowbray

George Jones (M)

Thomas Harris (GK)

Jamie Weston (GK)

Moor Park

Max Winbow (GK)

Karolina Smertiuk (GK)

JCB G&CC

Steven Haire (GK)

The Buckinghamshire

International

Jason Spence (I)

North West, Ireland

Arni Thor Arnason (I)

Leynir, Iceland

Dean O'Doherty (I)

Club De Golf Vallée Du
Richelieu, Canada

Daniel Read (I)

Beaconsfield, Canada

Scott Hoffmann (I)

Scott Hoffmann Golf, USA

Julian Mark (I)

Golfclub Bodensee

Weissensberg, Germany

Þorbjörn Ingi Steinsson (I)

Oddur, Iceland

Northern

Thomas Jones (AGK)

Conwy

Jonathan Keith (AGK)

Liam Whitton (AGK)

Oakdale

Brad Snape (AGK)

The Wilmslow

Tom Beetham (AGK)

Cockermouth

Dante Houlgate (AGK)

Waterfront

Phillip Wrigley (GK)

Harwood

Kieran Harrup (GK)

Serlby Park

Lee Metcalfe (GK)

Blackburn

Shane Ryan (GK)

Aberdovey

Benjamin Wilson (GK)

Dunham Forest G&CC

Scotland

Andrew Struthers (AGK)

Paul Dougall (AGK)

Erskine

Matthew Smith (AGK)

Neil Farmer (GK)

Ladybank

Lee Shannon (DCM)

Stephen Sharkey (GK)

Brodie Kerr (GK)

Irvine

Tom McDonald (DHGK)

Carnwath

Stuart Hunter (GK)

Dalmahoy

Colin Taylor (GK)

Gullane

Cameron Mann (GK)

Lyle Harper (GK)

Craig Wilson (GK)

Meldrum House

Alan Cameron (GK)

Brora

South East

Louie Adams (APP)

Toby Bunting (APP)

Barnham Broom Hotel

Kieran Button (APP)

The Hertfordshire

Stuart Craske (APP)

Sheringham

Leon Scicluna (APP)

Royal Mid-Surrey

George Thompson (APP)

Bramley

Benjamin Stokes (APP)

Mason Groom (AGK)

Ipswich

Jack Wilkinson (AGK)

The London

Tyrese Fairmaner (AGK)

Little Channels Golf Centre

David Hurst (AGK)

Gaz Hall (AGK)

Beaverbrook

Spencer Cooper (AGK)

Essex G&CC

Harry Miller (AGK)
Malden

Andy Johnson (GK)
Robert Sandys (AGK)
Royal Ashdown Forest

Jamie Carter (AGK)
The West London Golf
Centre

**Samuel Pullen-Merriman
(GK)**

Bradley Hobbs (DHGK)
Owen Skinner (GK)
Moor Park

Michael Cresswell (M)
St George's Hill

Shay Ward (GK)
Simon Collingridge (GK)
The Buckinghamshire

Thierry Lawrence (GK)
Dunstable Downs

 **South West & South
Wales**

Morgan Hughes (APP)
Ffos Las Racecourse

Ben Mister (APP)
Ogbourne Downs

Luke Garland (ATP)
Dinas Powis

Gregory Hewitt (AGK)
Meyrick Park

Jack Harrod (AGK)
Crane Valley

Kieran Gooding (AGK)
Tom Winwood (GK)
Remedy Oak

James Towner (DHGK)
Raglan

Luke Murray (GK)
Knowle

David Juliff (HGK)
Mountain Ash

Robert Rogers (HGK)
Portsmouth

Joseph Donovan (GK)
Max Perkins (GK)
Ethan Horsfall (AGK)
Old Thorns Hotel & Resort

Alex Collins (FA)
Exeter



BIGGA
CPD Continuing Professional
Development

**Congratulations to the following
members who have achieved
CPD Approved status**

Dean Harrison, Hurlston Hall G&CC

Chris James, Bocket Hall G&CC

Richard Shields, Holywell

Sandy Reid, St Andrews Links Trust

Lee Jones, Conwy

Antony Kirwan, Romford

Mitchell Izzard, High Legh Park

Stewart Marshall, Workington

Ryan McCulloch, Goswick Links

Tom Smith, Golf Club Wylihof, Switzerland

Samuel Hughes, Ganton

Tom Fowler, Woodbridge



Ganton

**Congratulations to the following
members who have achieved
their CPD Milestone**

Simon Parmenter, Sunningdale



Sunningdale Old Course

Key

A	Affiliate Member
AGK	Assistant Greenkeeper
APP	Apprentice
ATP	Approved Training Provider
CA	College Assessor
CM	Course Manager
DCM	Deputy Course Manager
DHGK	Deputy Head Greenkeeper
FA	First Assistant
GK	Greenkeeper
G	Groundsperson
HGK	Head Greenkeeper
HG	Head Groundsperson
I	International Member
L	Life Member
M	Mechanic
P	Partner
R	Retired Member
RP	Regional Patron
S	Supporter
ST	Student Member
SUP	Superintendent

A collage of various photographs from a trade show, showing people walking on red and green carpeted floors, interacting at booths, and looking at equipment. Brands like Toro, Kubota, and Reesink are visible in the background.

BIGGA TURF MANAGEMENT EXHIBITION

PROUD TO HOST #BTME2026

REGISTER NOW



HARROGATE
CONVENTION CENTRE
20-22 JANUARY 2026



Members & Careers

Where we meet your fellow turf professionals and share their stories

- Incoming BIGGA President John Wells MG looks ahead to his new role
- The BIGGA National Championship at Wallasey and Royal Liverpool



An American greenkeeper in London: Brent Downs on his week at Wentworth

Brent Downs, CGCS MG, shares his reflections on his week with the BMW PGA Championship Volunteer Support Team at Wentworth.

"If you'd told me a year ago that I'd be mowing fairways under the English moon at Wentworth, I'd have chuckled and shook my head. Yet there I was - jet-lagged, watching mist drift over a castle-like clubhouse, the scent of cut bentgrass rising in the cool air.

"Wentworth isn't just a golf course, it's an experience of prestige and standard. Every surface feels intentional, every process deliberate. The first morning I stood on those fairways, I wasn't thinking about agronomy - I was thinking how lucky I was to do work that crosses oceans.

"I expected the experience to highlight the differences of American versus UK golf courses - input levels, turf types, sustainability. Instead, it reminded me how universal this craft really is. Wherever you go, standards are still standards. Crisp lines, uniform texture, attention to detail - it's the same pursuit spoken with different accents. You don't need translation for good work; you can see it, smell it and feel it.

"What I brought home from Wentworth wasn't just a list of agronomic insights, it was perspective. Seeing younger professionals work with such energy and curiosity reminded me that leadership isn't just about direction - it's about connection, it's about asking

questions, sharing ideas and staying willing to learn, no matter your title or years in the business.

"By week's end, my notebook was full of observations, but the lessons weren't always technical - they were human. Wentworth reminded me that opportunity isn't defined by where you go, but by what the experience gives back to you.

"In my case, it is a series of new connections and the opportunity to pause - and to experience greenkeeping back at our roots again. The hum of mowers before sunrise. The laughter between tasks. The quiet pride of a job done right.

"I went to London to help prepare a tournament. I came home reminded why I love this profession." **GI**

'A tremendous honour'



Incoming BIGGA
President John
Wells MG is relishing
the opportunity of a
lifetime



Top: John on a visit to Whitby; **Middle:** John with one of his grandchildren; **Bottom Left:** Updating the workboard at South Herts; **Bottom Right:** On the course at South Herts



Left: At LA Golf & Country Club; Right: John with one of his grandchildren

John Wells MG travelled the world during a long and distinguished career in which he attained Master Greenkeeper status, but he says being nominated as BIGGA President is one of his greatest honours.

When he received the news in October, John was at first reluctant to believe it was true, admitting that he had met more than a few colleagues along the way who were “more than capable” of pulling precisely that kind of prank.

But after careful reassurance from the incumbent President, John was convinced he wasn't having his leg pulled.

“I was quite taken aback when I received the call from Ronnie Myles to ask if I'd consider the position,” he said. “At first, I thought it might be a wind-up from some mates! But once I realised it was genuine, I was over the moon. I've been on Cloud Nine ever since.”

The 66-year-old has stepped into the role of President Elect, supporting Ronnie for the remainder of his term. He will formally take up the presidency at our Annual General Meeting next month, held online in January.

With more than four decades of experience across the world, John brings a lifetime of knowledge, skill and perspective to the role. Over that time, he has worked in the UK and internationally, trained and mentored countless greenkeepers and helped shape the evolution of the profession.

John's greenkeeping journey began at Welwyn Garden City, where his potential quickly became apparent. By 20, he had ascended to the role of head greenkeeper, a responsibility he held for 16 years. From there, he moved to

Brocket Hall, where he oversaw major course developments and increasingly took on international projects, having his passport stamped in Cyprus, Russia, France and beyond.

In 1995, John achieved Master Greenkeeper status – only the 10th member to do so at the time. It was a milestone that marked the dedication and skill he had brought to the role over decades. His final full-time post was at South Herts Golf Club, where he retired in 2023, having left a lasting legacy of high standards and mentorship.

Looking ahead to his presidential year, John is excited to fly the flag for the association and its members on the domestic and international stage.

“It's very much an ambassadorial role,” he said. “I'll be representing the association at events across the UK and abroad, meeting members and supporting the BIGGA team wherever I can.”

“It's also a great opportunity for a retired greenkeeper who has the time to dedicate fully to the role. I see it as a chance to give something back to the profession that's given me everything.”

“It's incredibly rewarding to see people develop their careers”

In addition to acting as the public face of BIGGA, the President also joins the Board of Management. John's wealth of experience will help guide the association in its mission to support and develop greenkeepers and turf



professionals. His focus on education, in particular, is central to his vision.

"When I started out, there were very few training opportunities," he said. "The development of structured education within the association has transformed the profession, and I'm proud to have seen that evolution firsthand."

Education has long been at the heart of John's career. From the early days of learning on the job under more experienced greenkeepers to his own formal qualifications, he has seen the profession grow in sophistication.

"When I began in the 1970s, there was no formal training for greenkeepers, just general horticultural courses," he said. "Most of what I learned came from other greenkeepers who were generous with their time and experience. Once structured education came through BIGGA and the GTC, it transformed the profession. I've always believed that knowledge and dedication go hand in hand – you need both to succeed."

Achieving Master Greenkeeper status was a defining moment, surpassed only by his latest achievement in being named President.

"That was definitely one of the proudest moments of my career," he said. "It took four years of hard work and I honestly didn't think I'd make it. But it opened doors for me and gave me the confidence to speak publicly and to mentor others. It wasn't about elitism, it was about raising standards for everyone."

Mentorship has remained a constant theme. At Bocket Hall, John took great pride in training his team, building the foundations for their own professional development.

"That's how I learned – from others who were ahead of

me," he said. "When I was at Bocket Hall, I made a point of training and supporting the team. Many of them have since gone on to become course managers themselves, and that's something I take great pride in. I still mentor greenkeepers now through my consultancy work. It's incredibly rewarding to see people develop their careers."

With his own career having taken him far and wide, John not only diversified his agronomic skill set, but also his appreciation for different cultures and working environments.

"I was fortunate to work in places like Cyprus, France and Russia, helping to build and manage courses," he said. "They were fantastic opportunities. Each project taught me something new, not just about turf, but about people and cultures. Of course, the travel was demanding, and there were sacrifices, but I wouldn't change it for anything."

Reflecting on the industry's evolution, John noted the stark contrast between when he started and the present day.

"It's completely different," he said. "When I began, it was mainly physical work with limited resources. Now it's far more technical and mentally demanding. Expectations have also risen dramatically. Television coverage has created a 'tournament standard' mindset, and that can put real pressure on course teams. Balancing those expectations while protecting wellbeing is one of the big challenges for today's greenkeepers."

Though retired from full-time course management, John remains active. He consults at a 36-hole course near his Hertfordshire home, maintains two cricket squares and travels regularly to visit his son, Harry, golf course superintendent at Dubai Creek Golf Club.

"I've got plenty to keep me busy," he said. "I still travel



Top: With his son, Harry; Bottom: Out and about in Chiang Mai, Thailand

“BIGGA has achieved so much in education and professional development”

regularly and try to stay active. I love to spend time with my family and grandchildren. Taking on the presidency will mean more travel again, but that's fine – I'm really looking forward to it.”

He is particularly relishing the opportunity to meet members at clubs and events around the country and beyond as he seeks to make his own mark on an association that means a great deal to him.

“BIGGA has achieved so much in education and professional development, and I'm proud to be part of that story,” he said. “I just want to represent the association with pride and help continue the good work that's already being done.”

He is stepping into a role previously held by some of the profession's most respected figures, and he recognises the responsibility that comes with it.

“It's a tremendous honour and I am delighted to have the opportunity to give back to an industry that has given so much to me,” he said. “I'm a firm believer in education and that is something I am keen to champion during my spell as President.”

For John, the role is a natural extension of a career that has always combined passion, expertise, and a desire to mentor. His journey, from an eager young greenkeeper at Welwyn Garden City to a world-travelled Master Greenkeeper, has been extraordinary, and now he brings that experience to BIGGA at a pivotal time for the association.

“I've been lucky enough to work in some incredible places, but what I've always enjoyed most is helping others succeed,” he said. “I'll do my utmost to represent the association and its members to the best of my ability.” **GI**

Home comforts for BIGGA National champion Josh

Wallasey and Royal Liverpool provided the stage as Josh McMahon played the starring role at the BIGGA National Championship



Josh McMahon was thrilled to make the most of home advantage as he claimed victory in the BIGGA National Championship with Golf Finance and MJ Abbott.

The Wallasey greenkeeper and former pro fired a stunning 64 in the opening round on his home course, matched only by Jamie Watson of Rothley Park, before carding a gritty 79 at Royal Liverpool to finish on -1 and secure a one-stroke triumph. Craig Davidson of Mortonhall completed the top three.

"I'm absolutely delighted to have won, to be honest," said Josh. "It was my first time playing in the event so to come away with the win, especially here, is really special."

A long-time Wallasey member and now part of a greenkeeping team reshaping the renowned links, Josh made his course knowledge count, having also played Hoylake during the recent English Amateur, where the same two venues hosted.

“I’m absolutely delighted”

"It definitely is an advantage," he said. "There are a few little run-offs and areas where you can land the ball and knowing that definitely helps."

That insight comes from years competing at the top level of amateur

golf and making it to the professional ranks before switching careers.

"I was a full-time amateur golfer for six or seven years and represented England on a number of occasions," he said. "One of the highlights was winning the Lytham Trophy in 2019.

"After that I turned pro and played on various tours around the world, a couple of Challenge Tour events as well. It took me all over."

Since moving into greenkeeping at Wallasey three years ago, Josh's playing pedigree has sharpened his understanding of course preparation.

"There are certain things that I probably spot that somebody who hasn't played golf at the level I have might not see as easily," he explained.

Golf Finance

6 MJ
ABBOTT
YEARS
1965 – 2025

BIGGA National Championship results

BIGGA National Championship Challenge Trophy

- 1 Josh McMahon, Wallasey
- 2 Jamie Watson, Rothley Park
- 3 Craig Davidson, Mortonhall
- 4 James Lynch, West Sussex
- 5 Chris Soanes, Rookery Park

BIGGA National Championship Challenge Cup

- 1 Hayden Main, Worlebury
- 2 Leigh Clarke-Mordy, Knowle

Affiliate

Andy de Wet, Origin Amenity

BIGGA National Championship Regional Cup

Central England: Dan Branson, Stanton-on-the-Wolds; Graeme MacDonald, life member; Alex Ashwin; Jamie Watson, Rothley Park

Senior Prize

Sid Arrowsmith

Daily Prizes

Day 1 Cat 1 – Paul Teviotdale, Montrose
 Day 1 Cat 2 – Alan Taylor, Ryton
 Day 1 Cat 3 – Caroline Munroe, Bonar Bridge & Ardgay
 Day 2 Cat 1 – Mark Latham, Dunscar
 Day 2 Cat 2 – Charlie Collins, Southwick Park
 Day 2 Cat 3 – Ian Kirwan, Bramhall



"I appreciate how a good player would like the course to be set up, the condition of greens and fairways, and I really appreciate when you're putting on good greens and hitting from well-manicured fairways."

Hosting a field of greenkeepers added some extra pressure, but that was something Josh relished.

"That was in the back of everyone's minds, wanting to present the best possible course, because you've got more potential critics than you'll ever have again," he laughed.

"The whole team did a really good job and the golf course was fantastic." **GI**



Making an impact at Wallasey



A bold vision and meticulous attention to detail have defined John McLoughlin's five years at Wallasey, where he and his team are reshaping a classic links

When John McLoughlin arrived at Wallasey Golf Club in 2020, he stepped into a role rich in heritage and full of potential.

The famous Wirral links, already boasting a fine reputation, still presented John with an opportunity to make his mark, and he knew how. Now five years into his tenure, the transformation has been striking. Green complexes have evolved and the course's presentation has been elevated to match its championship pedigree.

That progress was clear for all to see when Wallasey co-hosted this year's BIGGA National Championship alongside its illustrious neighbour, Royal Liverpool.

"It went really well," said John. "The weather ended up being nice for the day, which was a huge relief given the forecast. It turned into a real success and we were very pleased."

The championship gave John and his team a chance to showcase not

only the quality of their work but the scale of change achieved in a relatively short period. Co-hosting with Hoylake and welcoming a field consisting largely of fellow greenkeepers came with its own kind

**“We’ve really
doubled down
on attention to detail”**

of pressure.

"I'd say I was probably apprehensive," he said. "Not nervous exactly, but maybe feeling a bit of pressure. We'd just co-hosted the English Amateur with Hoylake earlier in the summer, but I actually felt more pressure hosting the BIGGA Nationals. I was probably more excited for it too."

"In the end, both courses presented brilliantly and were well received. I think we represented the Wirral really

well in terms of course setup and attention to detail."

The fact that it was one of his own team who claimed the top prize provided a little extra satisfaction for John.

"One of our own green staff winning was brilliant – that really capped it off," he said. "It was superb to see. Josh played in the English Amateur this year at both Wallasey and Hoylake and did really well, so he had plenty of competitive rounds under his belt. That experience around both courses was a big advantage."

The Wallasey John inherited was a strong layout, but his vision has been to restore its original playing characteristics with a modern twist, while also reintroducing some of the scale that had eroded over time.

"We've really doubled down on attention to detail and expanded the playing surfaces significantly," he explained. "The greens have increased in size by around 30%, and we've



extended the short grass areas and run-offs by about 50%. Fairways and mowing lines have been pushed out too. It's all led to it becoming a more interesting course."

Those extensions have had practical as well as aesthetic benefits. An increased variety of pin positions means less wear, improved turf health and broader strategic variety. It's a change that also reflects the collaborative culture John has fostered within the club, one where ambition has been met with support, all underpinned by clear communication.

"Once we started expanding the greens and uncovering new pin positions, and extending the run-offs, it became clear what we were trying to achieve," he said. "From there, it was really well supported and everyone has been fully behind it."

"We partnered with Clayton, DeVries & Pont, which helped because their vision aligned closely with mine."

Having such a respected architecture firm involved gave our plans credibility. Beyond that, it came down to education – newsletters, member forums, open communication. Once people understood the reasoning, they got behind it."

That sense of togetherness and inclusion also runs through the greenkeeping team, consisting of 10 full-time and six part-time staff, who are "all pulling in the same direction".

John said: "The team's been fantastic. Again, communication is key – making sure everyone knows the vision and feels part of it. We make a lot of decisions collectively, so everyone has input. When people feel ownership of the outcome, the buy-in is much stronger."

Wallasey's evolution hasn't been confined to its greens. John has implemented a range of agronomic, environmental and aesthetic improvements designed to make the links more sustainable, resilient and

reflective of its setting, but he insists they are just getting started.

"A lot of what we've done is tweaking holes individually to bring the best out of each one," he said. "Our vision long term is a little bit more dramatic, potentially new holes going in and further changes, but as the course is now, without any major changes, we've done a lot of cosmetic stuff and captured a lot of easy wins. We know there is still a hell of a lot more to do."

With that in mind, exciting developments are already underway that will further enhance the offering at Wallasey.

"We're building a new short game area that'll give members and visitors a world-class practice facility," John revealed. "We're also doing more work on run-offs and bunkering – again, focusing on detail and refinement. Next year we're hosting an international match between England and Ireland's under-18s, which we're really looking forward to." **GI**

'Proud to be part of the Open family'



The operation at Hoylake runs like a well-oiled machine, with James Bledge and his team producing exceptional standards



Hosting The Open could make any other tournament seem like small fry, but the desire to show Royal Liverpool in its best light is an ongoing pursuit for James Bledge.

When the BIGGA National came to Hoylake, the course manager was eager for the links to shine – and that it certainly did.

“The event itself went really well,” he said. “I was a bit concerned about the weather to start off with because when you’re welcoming people to the course, you want them to see it in the sunshine. The fescue looks brilliant in the sun, it really bursts, but when it’s dull and overcast, it just doesn’t have quite the same appeal.

“The standard of play overall was amazing. It was a great mix too – you don’t just want all the elite players; this championship is for everyone. There was a 64-shot difference between the best and worst, but everyone got round in good time and, most importantly, enjoyed it. That’s what matters – giving people the chance to play somewhere like this.”

With standards fit to meet the “sky high” expectations that come with the territory at such a prestigious club, James admits there was precious little for him and his team to do beforehand.

“Here at Hoylake, we keep things

Wallasey and caddied for John on the front nine, which was a pleasure. It was great to see how good that place was and how he had set the course up, so I could do something similar – not too hard, not too easy – just matching the standard. John was level par when I left him, and he’s a hell of a golfer. Wallasey was absolutely impeccable. Really, really superb. I’m John’s biggest fan, really, and you can quote that!”

Knowing the course was primed to shine, James could look beyond the event to the next stage of the year’s work. With the BIGGA National marking the end of a busy competitive calendar, his attention quickly turned to essential maintenance tasks designed to ensure the course remained in top condition heading into the winter months.

“As soon as the last group passed the first hole, we were out micro-coring, seeding and topdressing,” he said. “Then the drill-and-fill machine came in, working on the 6th, 10th and 14th greens. The BIGGA National was our last big event of the year, and once the visitors finished the Friday before, it was time to crack on with our autumn maintenance.

“I’d been keeping an eye on the weather and soil temperatures all week because, at that time of year, timing is everything. The sooner you get seed

also demonstrated their capability to perform at the very highest level.

“I loved it – the planning, the build-up, the whole thing,” he said. “The lack of sleep through the week was tough, and I don’t miss that part, but the recovery went really well. I’ve enjoyed the Opens more since then, probably because we’ve really invested in the course and are proud to be part of the Open family. It sounds like a cliché, but it’s true – it’s a privilege.

“We’re looking forward to when we host again, and we don’t have too many changes to make before then. The weather was horrendous at the time, but the recovery was impressive. You can hardly tell now – everything’s fully back.”

Next year promises to be another big one at Hoylake. The club’s busy calendar continues, with a packed schedule of elite amateur and professional events that will once again put the spotlight on James and his greenkeeping team. Planning is already well underway to ensure Royal Liverpool is prepared for every challenge, from logistics and presentation to the finer agronomic details that underpin tournament success.

“We’re now looking ahead to 2026 and The Amateur Championship, which is huge for us,” he said. “We’ve got loads of big events next year – Birkdale has The Open, Lytham has The Ladies, so it’s a massive year for the North West.

“We’re doing some course changes too, adding and filling in some bunkers, adjusting hole strategies and starting a big drainage project, which was meant to begin during the BIGGA Championships but got delayed. Once that gets going, we’ll be flying.

“Yes, 2025 was challenging, but I’d take that every year,” he said. “It was nice to have dry, sunny conditions and good temperatures. We’re always moaning about being cold, wet and windy, but for once we had something like a Spanish spring and autumn. It’s been a joy, to be honest, I think everyone’s felt uplifted by it.” **GI**

“The weather was horrendous at the time, but the recovery was impressive”

to such a high standard that, when events like this come around, there’s not much extra to do – in fact, almost nothing,” he said. “We’re always working to maintain that level, though it’s well-oiled now. We know what needs doing each day to keep the standard up, so there’s no real stress.

“On the day of the championship, we changed holes, cut and rolled greens, cut fairways and achieved good green speeds. They were stimping at 10 feet, which we were very happy with for that time of year.

“The day before, I went across to

in the ground, the better. You don’t want to miss that window – being just a week late can mean low soil temperatures or frost, which ruins your chances of good fescue germination.”

Casting his mind back to The Open in 2023, James reflected on a career-defining moment. Hosting one of sport’s most enduring and alluring events brought a unique set of pressures and expectations, but also immense pride for everyone connected to Royal Liverpool. It was a year that tested the team’s stamina and precision to the limit, but one that



Latest job vacancies

From trainee vacancies to senior management roles, new greenkeeping job opportunities are added daily to BIGGA's online recruitment pages. Our website receives 1.6m page views per year and 55% of those are to our careers pages. Visit bigga.org.uk/careers to see our latest opportunities and find out more about advertising your position. Call 01347 833 800 or email info@bigga.co.uk

Technical Area Sales Manager

ICL Turf & Landscape

Recruiting two Technical Area Sales Managers to support distributors and turf managers across golf, sports and amenity sectors. The role focuses on driving sales, providing technical guidance and helping turf managers get the best from their surfaces through practical, evidence-based advice. One position covers South East England, ideally from the surrounding counties, the other covers Central and North Scotland, ideally from the Central Belt or Fife. You'll be motivated, knowledgeable and passionate about turf, with experience in technical product sales or hands-on turf management. Strong communication skills and sound agronomic understanding are important, with an industry qualification preferred. The role includes frequent travel and offers a competitive salary, company car and strong development opportunities.

Send your CV and covering letter by Friday 19 December to Annie Wilson – annie.wilson@icl-group.com

Greenkeeper

Ashton-In-Makerfield, Greater Manchester



Ashton-in-Makerfield is seeking an **experienced Greenkeeper** to work within an established team on the day-to-day operations. The appointment is central to our business plan of providing a quality golfing experience to all our members and visitors. Applicants should have at least five years greenkeeping experience with excellent technical knowledge and the ability to achieve the highest standards of course management. The successful applicant should be self-motivated and must be able to work well in a team environment. Ideally, possessing spraying certificates and some health & safety knowledge would be beneficial, but there has to be a passion for presenting an aesthetically pleasing product. Please make applications in writing - including a full CV, current salary and two referees - to Garry Lacy, secretary@ashton-in-makerfieldgolfclub.co.uk by **Monday 8 December**. Salary will be negotiable depending on experience and qualifications.

Deputy Course Manager

Chipstead Golf Club, Surrey



We are seeking an experienced and highly motivated individual to join our team.

The successful candidate will work alongside our Course Manager in maintaining the golf course to a high standard, as well as leading, motivating and training our team.

You must have a recognised sportsturf qualification, greenkeeping experience and PA1, 2 & 6 certificates. Chainsaw certificates and tournament experience are desirable.

Salary is negotiable depending on experience, knowledge and qualifications. We offer BIGGA membership, golf privileges, full uniform, education and training opportunities.

Please send a full CV and covering letter to: Hayley.Petrie@eic.co.uk

Head Greenkeeper

Thurso Golf Club, Scottish Highlands



Thurso Golf Club (on the NC500 Route) has an exciting opportunity for a passionate, hardworking individual.

Qualifications & experience

The successful applicant must be a good team worker but comfortable working alone at times, highly motivated, able to make decisions and able to operate the full range of equipment associated with the post.

- Previous greenkeeping experience
- Full, clean driving licence
- NVQ Level 3 or the equivalent in Greenkeeping and Sports Turf Management

Flexible working patterns can be agreed.

Salary will be commensurate with candidate's experience and qualifications and follow the BIGGA Guidelines.

Please email your letter of application to the Club Captain at: thursogolfclub@gmail.com by Friday 19 December

Assistant Greenkeeper

Colony Club Gutenhof, Austria



The Colony Club Gutenhof near Vienna is looking for Assistant Greenkeepers to join our team for the upcoming 2026 season from March/April to November/December. The candidate should have a minimum of five-years' experience and be qualified to a minimum NVQ Level 2 or equivalent to be able to apply for their Visa. The successful applicants will work as part of a hard-working team, contributing to the maintenance on both of our Championship courses. Help will be provided to obtain your work Visa.

- €2500 per month depending on experience, plus an additional month's wage paid extra over the season. Overtime paid extra.
- Accommodation available to rent on site; lunch provided during season; first flight over is paid for; free golf and use of facilities; uniform provided.

If interested please send a cover letter and CV to Sean Baxter via email to: baxter@colonygolf.com

Head Greenkeeper

Fynn Valley Golf Club, Suffolk



Fynn Valley is a family friendly golf club that also offers luxury holiday accommodation and caravan site. The club is looking to recruit a Head Greenkeeper to manage the golf course and the greenkeeping team, as directed by the GM.

Job specification: Plan, monitor and manage golf course maintenance; manage the greenkeeping team and use of physical resources; maintain grounds of the club's facilities, including garden areas for holiday lodges and caravan site.

Additional responsibilities: Maintain a safe, healthy workplace; manage budgets; recruitment; performance, training and development of staff; manage conflict, discipline and grievance.

Benefits: 28 days holiday pa; training opportunities; uniform & PPE; use of course; staff meals; healthcare; pension scheme. Salary £35,000 - £38,000 per annum, depending on qualifications and experience.

Please send CV and cover letter to robert@fynn-valley.co.uk

The Relief Greenkeeper: Staffing support when you need it

After building a successful pilot across North West England, Duncan Cheslett's Relief Greenkeeper service is rolling out nationwide, providing golf clubs with flexible, short-term greenkeeping support exactly when they most need it.

A former cabinet maker turned greenkeeper, Duncan launched the business after switching careers in the wake of the pandemic. Combining his practical skills with a lifelong passion for golf and course architecture, he saw an opportunity to support clubs struggling to manage staff absences and seasonal pressures.

"I worked at several courses around the Manchester area, and I loved it," he said. "But when you've worked for yourself all your life, your mind is always turning over business ideas."

The service allows golf clubs to call on experienced greenkeepers to cover gaps caused by holidays, sickness, recruitment delays or tournament preparation.

"The most common situation is when they're a person down because someone's left," Duncan explained. "Recruitment takes a couple of months, so by the time the advert's gone out and applications are processed, they've got a gap to fill. That's where we come in, filling that gap until they're back to full strength."

Duncan has already placed freelance greenkeepers at more than 20 clubs and events, including Wallasey for the English Amateur, St Anne's Old Links, Hesketh, and even Royal Portrush during The Open. The response from course

managers has been overwhelmingly positive.

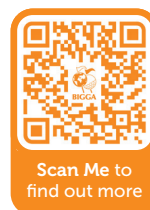
"It seems to be an idea whose time has come — a service nobody's offered before," he said. "You see it in other industries, with locum doctors and supply teachers, but it's new to greenkeeping."

"The response has been unbelievable, and I'm getting calls and emails from golf clubs all over the country."

To date, operations have focused mainly in the North West, but The Relief Greenkeeper now has freelancers working in Lincolnshire, Ireland, Aberdeenshire and Scotland's Central Belt. As the service expands, Duncan says flexibility will remain key.

"I'll bend absolutely to market demand. If there's a need, we'll strive to meet it," he said. "I've even had a local club ask for someone every Sunday morning to help set the course up because they're struggling to get staff to work weekends."

Clubs can hire greenkeepers directly via the service, with straightforward contracts and no additional employment costs. Duncan explained: "The contract is between the greenkeeper and the golf club, who pay them directly. Separately, the club pays us a facilitation fee for organising and administering the placement. The greenkeepers work as self-employed contractors, directly for the clubs." **GI**



Keeping blades sharper for longer



All in One Grinder

Jupiter ATI 6.0

A fully automatic relief spin grinder, designed to deliver precision grinding at its best.

Book your demonstration today

✉ sales@howardsongroup.com

☎ 01332 824777



For more information or a no obligation demonstration call **01332 824777** or visit www.huntergrinders.com

Proudly part of **Howardson Group Ltd**

CONFIDENCE.

IN EVERY CUT.



FC Series

HIGH PRODUCTIVITY GUARANTEED.

Achieve a precise finish with a contour-following deck, rapid centre-collect system, and HTC™ traction for maximum comfort and safety.

*On selected models.



VISIT US AT BTME STAND 624

Scan the QR code for more information.

www.kubota.co.uk



For Earth, For Life
Kubota



Practical Greenkeeping

Refine your skillset and expand your knowledge



Course manager Aidan Wright shares how Camberley Heath approaches winter work, balancing course presentation with the realities of cold, dark mornings



What we do in... December

Club: Camberley Heath, Surrey

As a club, we are always trying to progress and develop the golf course as best we can, and December gives us the chance to focus on areas that often get overlooked during the busy season.

This year, a lot of our attention is going into the heather. After such a prolonged drought, we've seen a very high population of saplings, bramble, and everything in between. Drought slows down almost everything except the weeds you don't want, and they take full advantage of any space they can find. We'll be concentrating heavily on presentation, tackling the little details that make a real difference to how the course looks and plays.

We don't have a major construction project on the agenda this year, which gives us the opportunity to focus on the finer points: the small tasks around the course that can be difficult to get to during a busy summer.

For me, the main bulk of December will involve clearing leaves where we can while also working on the heather and the areas around the greens complexes, ensuring that everything is in the best possible condition for

whatever winter throws at us.

When it comes to recovery, there's only so much we can do until conditions improve. You can always give it a little attention with feed programmes or continuing with our 20-20-30 mix to keep the plant protected and processes in place. But once the peak of the cold weather hits and scarring has set in, you're then looking ahead to the maintenance weeks: planning where to sow seed and start forcing recovery.

This year, with a slow start to spring, we found that everyone was waiting for recovery to kick in, and it felt like

we had stalled before the season had even begun. The key is to be as prepared as possible, with the right timings in place to push recovery when the conditions allow.

December is a tough month for greenkeeping teams, who start early in dark, cold, wet conditions. Keeping morale high is vital and it's important to do whatever you can to ensure the team stays motivated. If you can bring a little bit of light to those dark winter days and maintain that spirit, that's as important as the work itself. **GI**



“December is a tough month for greenkeeping teams”



Season long moisture management

Weather conditions over the past year have exemplified the challenges of moisture management for greenkeepers



Author: Sean Loakes, Syngenta Technical Manager UK & Ireland

Climate extremes of severe wet and flooding through the winter, followed by prolonged drought conditions across much of the country in a super-hot summer have highlighted the increasing challenges

of moisture management.

With water use on golf courses under increasing scrutiny, especially for clubs without adequate storage or extraction capability and reliant on mains supply, making better use of available resources is crucial.

The potential impacts of dry patch on surface quality, coupled with players' demands for better year-round playing conditions, puts moisture management top of the agenda.

New Syngenta research has shown the issues can occur over far shorter timescales that will stress plants and

impact turf health – even hour-by-hour between irrigation scheduling or after a rain event.

Rootzone retention

The conundrum for consistency is how to move excess water away from the surface to maintain playability and green speed, while also retaining sufficient moisture in the soil profile for plant and soil health. Moisture in the rootzone remains essential for nutrient uptake, as well as providing H₂O for photosynthetic activity.

Conventional penetrant wetting

“Moisture stress can impact on plant health in a matter of hours”

Action checklist for season long moisture management

- Monitor and record moisture regularly
- Map areas of the course where dry patch is seen
- Plan wetting agent strategies pre-season
- Use new technologies to balance moisture levels
- Start applications before soils dry out

New technologies to measure soil moisture, such as SPIIO soil probe sensors, enable more in depth understanding and future solutions for golf courses

Photo: STRI Syngenta wetting agent development trials preparation 2025/26

Retaining moisture deep into the profile promotes stronger rooting and plant health

agents can effectively help move water down through the soil profile. But that can quickly leave turf high and dry of available moisture, particularly in short-rooted turf over the summer or autumn.

Issues are exacerbated on sand construction greens and tees, where extended drought conditions now risk baking in the effects of hydrophobic dry patch. Even when moisture becomes available, either from natural rainfall or applied irrigation, hydrophobic soils physically repel the water molecules, that run through without being utilised.

The advent of long-chain non-ionic retainer technology, utilised in Qualibra wetting agent, has been instrumental in holding the balance of moisture in the root zone to support turf health.

Trials at STRI have shown how the wetting agent programme retained soil volumetric water content (VWC %) at a vital 3 – 10% above untreated areas, including up to 18% higher through mid-to-late July. This has confirmed previous science where Qualibra proved twice as effective as other premium wetting agents in retaining all important root zone moisture.

Soil resilience

Furthermore, new research using innovative SPIIO remote soil probes to constantly monitor and report on root zone conditions on a golf course scale throughout the year has proven how the wetting agent technology can more effectively manage moisture all season.

Results highlighted how the penetrant attributes of Qualibra consistently reduced soil moisture during the high rainfall early season, but as conditions dried out later in the season the combined retainer fraction

held 6-10% higher VWC at a 7cm root zone depth.

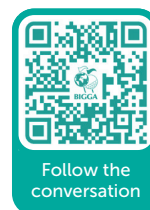
Crucially the new SPIIO monitoring has given a far more precise picture of soil moisture variability between rain events. When conventional industry wetting agent trials had historically relied on intermittent random soil moisture probe readings, now Syngenta scientists have hourly data readings of just what's happening under the soil – and always at the same point to be directly comparable.

It has shown just how variable soil moisture availability can be in untreated soils, which puts greater stress on turf plant health. With each spring rain event, soil VWC spiked by an average 8%, while the Qualibra penetrant element helped to avoid the high peaks and consistently maintain lower soil moisture levels.

However, into the summer with its severe lack of rainfall, the retainer technology enabled soils to be consistently held at a higher healthy VWC for longer. Maintaining the consistent moisture content reduces the risk of dry patch developing and enables turf to continue to function more effectively, take up nutrients that maintain stress resilience.

Most importantly, over the course of the season the Qualibra treated turf was held in the optimum greenkeepers' target 13-27% VWC for 11 weeks, compared to just five weeks in the untreated turf.

This greater in-depth understanding of precisely what is happening in the soil profile is essential for both managing wetting agent strategies to better utilise available resources now, and the development of new advanced products for the future.



Follow the conversation

BTME showcase

You can see the effects of hydrophobicity on golf course construction sands at BTME, and how Qualibra can help to balance water movement and retention. Visit the Syngenta stand for a demonstration and find out the figures on how hotter conditions with climate change will impact on your future day-to-day course management.

'The perfect storm' for high disease pressure



After an unusually dry summer and humid October, greenkeepers across the UK have faced perfect conditions for *Microdochium* patch. Industry expert Mark Hunt explains why disease pressure is so high

Greenkeepers across the UK are dealing with outbreaks of *Microdochium* patch after conditions created "the perfect storm", according to a leading expert.

The distinctive orange-brown scarring seen on putting surfaces is the result of a perfect alignment of climatic conditions that created ideal circumstances for the disease to thrive.

Microdochium Nivale, previously referred to as *Fusarium*, is a fungal disease that affects fine turf, particularly in mild, damp conditions. It weakens grass plants and leaves circular scars that can be unsightly while also impacting playability.

While greenkeepers are well-versed

in its management, this season's outbreaks have been so severe that even the most prepared courses have been affected to some extent.

Mark Hunt, Weather Analytics at Prodata Weather Systems, said this autumn's problems were the consequence of a prolonged period of turf stress followed by a precise sequence of weather events that favoured disease.

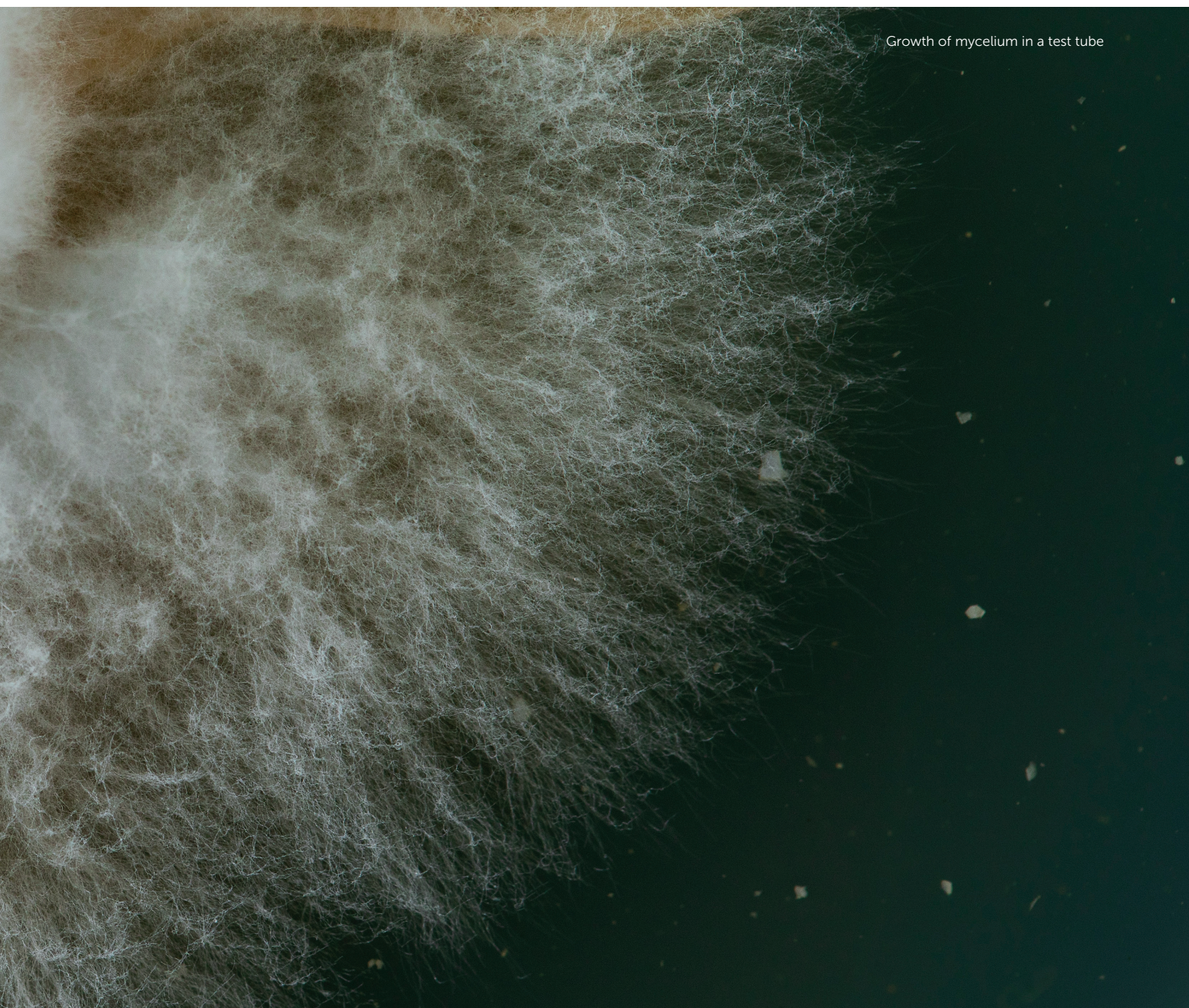
"We've come out of an extremely dry spring and summer, and that's left many plants weakened and under stress," he said.

"When turf goes into autumn in that condition, it's more vulnerable. It's a bit like us; if you've been burning the candle at both ends, you're more

likely to get ill because your body's tired. The grass plant's no different: it's been under pressure through spring and a hot, dry summer, so it's gone into the autumn slightly weaker than normal. That sets the stage."

The final trigger came with a high-pressure system that moved in during early October and trapped moisture near the surface. That weather pattern produced an extended run of heavy dew and mild overnight temperatures that gave the disease everything it needed to establish and spread.

"Normally high pressure brings settled weather, but this particular system trapped cool, moist air at ground level," Hunt explained. "That



meant a lot of dew and long periods of leaf wetness, combined with mild overnight temperatures. I looked at our weather station data from the 12th to the 15th of October, and some sites recorded up to 16 hours of unbroken leaf wetness. Microdochium typically only needs about six hours to become

pathogenic. Add in overnight temperatures of 11–13°C, close to its optimum growth range, and you've got the perfect storm: a wet grass leaf and mild nights."

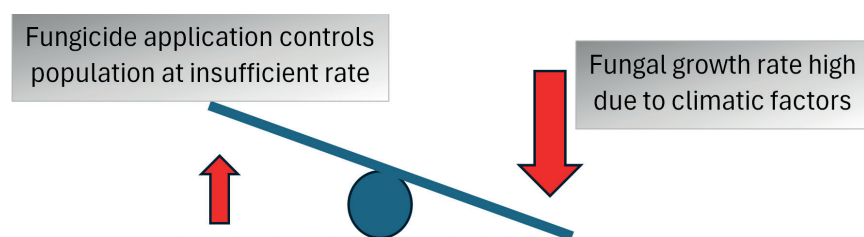
Even consistent maintenance practices could not fully counteract the unrelenting conditions. Dew

reforming throughout the day meant that even regular brushing/swishing offered only limited protection.

"Even if greenkeepers went out early to brush off dew, it would have just reformed an hour or two later and again as soon as the sun went down," Hunt said. "The plant surface stayed wet for most of the day and night, four days in a row. That's perfect for disease development, and that's why so many people suddenly saw outbreaks."

Many greenkeepers were well prepared, having applied dew dispersants and preventative fungicides in advance. However, the intensity of the conditions, coupled with the reduced potency of available

Symptom expression



chemical controls, made it impossible to fully protect every surface.

"In the past, when we had more effective fungicides, you had a good chance of containing an outbreak even when conditions were perfect for disease," said Hunt. "Nowadays, products are less effective and we must remember, they don't kill

Microdochium; they slow its growth. Once infection gets going, it's very hard to stop."

Even for those who executed every cultural and chemical practice correctly, the outcome often depended on local conditions such as shade, airflow and grass species. The outbreak highlights the growing

You've got a combination of increased pressure from the climate and reduced chemical control"

Case Study 1

Whitecraigs, Glasgow

Andy Wilson, course manager at Whitecraigs, a parkland course on Glasgow's south side, explains the conditions facing greenkeepers this autumn and why golfers should understand that even the most proactive course teams can't always keep disease at bay

The disease pressure this year is definitely worse. We've changed the way we manage things, so we now spray preventatively when we know the weather forecast is conducive to disease conditions, and we work all year to strengthen the plant to make it more resilient. It's not easy to justify to committees, because you're spraying for something that doesn't yet exist, and it costs the best part of £1,000 each time. But it's necessary.

At this time of year, we always expect to see disease, but we try to minimise fungicide use. Even then, it can catch you out quickly. Before I went on holiday recently, I'd applied a preventative spray. A few days later, I got a call to say a couple of spots of Fusarium were showing. By the time I returned, it had spread.



We sprayed again, but we'll probably have a little scarring that, hopefully, the temperatures will allow to heal before winter sets in.

Conditions in the west of Scotland are perfect for disease right now – mild, humid and with dew forming constantly. You can take it off in the morning, and it's back within two hours.

The climate is changing, and our tools to fight disease aren't what they used to be. Products today will knock it back, but they're not as effective as those we once had.

Golfers need to understand that even the best courses will get disease. Our job is to minimise its impact, but sometimes, despite all our efforts, it's not possible to prevent.



Microdochium patches



Leaf wetness sensor



Microdochium Mycelium

challenges posed by the changing climate, and Hunt insisted that is something everyone is going to have to come to terms with.

"The climate is changing," he said. "We're seeing warmer, more humid periods extending later into the year, conditions that favour disease development. At the same time, greenkeepers have fewer effective tools to control disease. So, you've got a combination of increased pressure from the climate and reduced chemical control – that's not an excuse; that's the reality."

That context, he believes, is vital for golfers to remember when they see diseases rear up on their courses. The problem is often not mismanagement, but an unavoidable consequence of the evolving environment and regulatory framework.

"Golfers will probably need to become a bit more tolerant to disease on their golf courses, because legislation is only going one way and the climate is only going the other," he said. "Your greenkeeper is probably working harder than ever to produce the same results, in tougher conditions and with fewer options." **GI**



**BIGGA Chief
Executive Jim
Croxton**

Despite some very challenging climatic conditions during 2025, in general golf courses in the UK have been presented to an extremely high standard and we have seen record numbers of golfers taking advantage. A high-pressure disease period like the one we have experienced is the last thing greenkeepers want as they look to ensure golf surfaces are optimised as we move towards winter. With legislation and climatic changes continuing to make life harder for course maintenance teams, I would urge golfers and club officials to engage with their course managers to understand the challenges they face.

Case study 2

Camberley Heath, Surrey



Aidan Wright, course manager at Camberley Heath, took steps to reduce turf stress and employed preventative spraying to mitigate the impact – but even his meticulous approach could only go so far



Like everyone at the moment, we've struggled with the conditions flipping on us quite quickly. We went from such a prolonged drought period, which caused so much stress on the plant throughout the back end of the season, to all of a sudden, the rain coming down, the temperature still being warm and it just opens the door for disease to really explode.

We've looked at hitting the timing of our sprays as close to perfection as possible, but no one can get it right every time, and sometimes the weather just doesn't allow for it.

It's about keeping an eye on when you can get sprays out and maintaining the health of the plant as much as possible.

We're heavily tree-lined and have a lot of shading issues, so we do have disease on a few greens and in some bad environments, but

nowhere near as bad as previously.

We lifted heights of cut early this year because last year we got hit badly. We can't take the risks anymore, so we'll go into a roll rather than a cut to avoid constantly stressing the plant, adding a few more rolls in the week when the weather allows. All these little bits help to protect us and keep conditions as good as possible for as long as possible.

Communication with members is key. As a young course manager, I've learned you need to be upfront – you are going to get disease, but if you keep people informed, it's easier to manage expectations.

We're very lucky to have a supportive board and committee, which is vital because you're already dealing with difficult circumstances and it helps a lot to have people in your corner.

An integration of design and technology



Paul Woodham, The R&A's Sustainability Lead for Europe, believes we can learn much from Black Water Links in Poland - a new, pesticide-free course, which had sustainability built into its design and is harnessing various forms of technology, including AI





I had a recent opportunity to present to the Polish Greenkeepers Conference, held at Black Water Links, Poznan. This brought together greenkeepers from a growing golf market across Poland, a country currently with just 20 18-hole golf courses, and neighbouring regions such as Estonia – an even-smaller market of six golf courses. Both countries, though, have a gaining interest in the game.

Growing the game is difficult, especially in smaller countries without a recognised route into greenkeeping. The threat posed by a lack of staffing resources is particularly real in regions with less recognition of greenkeeping as a viable career. Any perception that the smaller markets are flying under the radar is far from reality. So, can the development of golf courses in emerging markets have the same mindset for sustainability in comparison to say the UK, France or Spain, for example?

Take Poland and Estonia, where finding staff retention and entry into greenkeeping often relies on family and friend referrals or employment offices for entry-level staff or seasonal workers. This is an inevitable strain relying on the skill of the technical greenkeeping staff and therefore the operation of the golf course. We must recognise that, for some, the route into greenkeeping may be from basic education but that is not to say that, with the correct recognition and support – entry-level training – greenkeeping can be a lifelong career. We often say that, without



“The design is right for all aspects – visuals, playability, routing – and most importantly at a physical and technical level being functional for water management and its ability to deal with the climate”



greenkeepers, there are no golf courses.

My experience visiting Black Water Links is one where a new facility – three years into its existence – has recognised the threats and opportunities by building sustainability into the course design and technology.

Let's start from the design concept. The concept of the golf course architect, Casper Grauballe, was a back-to-basics approach to ensure the design was right for all aspects – visuals, playability, routing – and most

importantly, at a physical and technical level, being functional for water management and its ability to deal with the climate.

The operational functionality of the course was important in areas such as tee boxes and bunkers. Tees, for instance, are accessible for the golfer and provide the space needed for managing wear.

The design has increased the possibilities as accessibility is multi-functional. The rapid innovation and advancements in autonomous mowers have allowed this technology

to be integrated into today's maintenance practices.

The bunkers are designed to be able to deal with water. While lined with a permeable membrane, the design incorporated a reduced sand area but flashed sand lines for visibility and playability. The form and flow of the shaping maintains access, potentially for autonomous bunker raking equipment in the future, but allows easy movement of the robotics in use today. The greens shaping and construction considers the need to optimise the pinnable area of the



playing surface – important for managing wear – and uses contours to shed ponding water from the surface. This is important in a region where frost-thaw can cause significant damage.

One further point is the irrigation design, which affords individual and optimum control of sprinkler heads around the course, using more sprinklers but less water. Irrigation is piped 1km from the town, taking the opportunity to use treated water, which is filtered before entering the course reservoir. This is a solution that

works in collaboration with the local town. City water is now diverted from potential pollution points and reused on the golf course in a sustainable manner. A current project is the installation of a solar farm, which powers the clubhouse and irrigation system using energy stored from the day in battery storage – meaning that the whole facility will be energy independent by 2026.

Overall, the design and maintenance of the course facilitates the grass species selection, particularly in relation to nutrient and salt associated

with the use of treated water. The course microclimate maintains an open environment, which can be managed over time as the course matures.



The Course Manager,
Kris Misiaczynski,

incorporates on-site sensors and satellite AI technology with images downloaded five to 10

times per month to monitor soil moisture content across the whole course to inform early indication of



inconsistencies that may develop into turfgrass stress and disorders.

This analysis also provides indication of other stress, such as nutrient or growth deficiency.

Spray management incorporates conventional mounted spraying alongside innovation using drone spraying. This is relatively new territory, with the regulation for use still developing, but Kris can use drones for granular fertiliser application and soil or plant biostimulant during a half-day course closure window, which is a current stipulation for regulatory use.

Drones spot-treat localised areas identified for input to address performance or stress-related corrections.

The integration of autonomous mowers has been transformational for Black Water Links. All areas outside of the putting surfaces are maintained by robotics. Some 36 units work around the clock to cut the course. For Kris,

this has seen a reduction in staff hours from 130 to typically 17 hours per week across tees, fairways, green surrounds, pathways and rough. There are four cabled docking stations for recharging. The autonomous mowers can be sent back to their base during competitions and ordered back to work remotely upon completion. Black Water Links is maintained by 10 full-time greenstaff, the same as before the integration of autonomous mowers.

Routine play is uninterrupted, and Kris has the confidence that a Monday morning return to work is immediately focused on course conditioning, turf health management and the finer detail of presentation and performance.

The results achieved from design, technology and integrated turf management practices have seen the course being maintained pesticide-free to date. The integration of design and technology is working towards a

sustainable future, particularly from a skills and resources perspective, not to mention minimal use of fossil fuels in course maintenance. There will undoubtedly be other leaders with a similar vision for new and existing courses, but it was great to see one of the lesser-known regions striving to deliver a high-performance course in a sustainable way. **GI**



DENNIS

Golf greens and
tees maintained with
expertise & passion.



Discover



Seeder & Aerator

Battery Dedicated
Mowers

Battery Cassette Systems

Dedicated Mowers

Cassette Systems

For more information or a no obligation demonstration
call **01332 824777** or visit **www.dennisuk.com**

Proudly part of  **Howardson**
Group Ltd

Kress 

Built for the course.
Ready for the future.

Redefine course maintenance with the Kress KR237E robot mower. With intelligent RTK navigation, adjustable 10–60mm cutting height and high operating speed, it delivers a flawless finish without disrupting play. Working day or night, it saves time, cuts costs and eliminates emissions – the smart, sustainable choice for golf clubs looking to do more with less.

Contact your local grounds maintenance machinery dealer to learn more.

kress.com

Join us at

BTME

20TH – 22ND
JANUARY 2026



RTKⁿ
Real-time kinematic to the
power of network

Future-proofing Heysham

James Hutchinson visits Heysham Golf Club, where Course Manager Dave Hutchinson is leading an ambitious wetland water harvesting project



Heysham, just a few miles south of Morecambe, in Lancashire, is an extraordinarily important place, which holds many gems, such as Saint Patrick's Chapel and its associated rock-carved graves that date back to who knows when. It also boasts two nuclear power reactors and a nature reserve of huge importance, though it was the golf course that caught my attention.

Dave Hutchinson manages this important mosaic of land, and with a team of six, they create and develop wonders, some of which we will see in this feature. One of these wonders is an important bit of proactive conservation in the form of a wetland water-harvesting project.

Living on the north-west coast of England, where it rains all the time, I often think that we have more than enough water going forward, but that could all change over the course of a season, and with regulation moving towards landowners and managers being required to secure their own water, this is unquestionably a project of the utmost importance.

High on the list of things to do for golf courses is the creation of their own water source. I cannot stress the

importance of this highly enough and I hope that this feature goes some way to opening the eyes of certain golf clubs and their march towards that looming cliff face, which is 2030 to be precise.

Firstly, I asked Dave why he and the club are creating these projects. Dave mentioned he is going to retire in 2027, and by then he will have worked at Heysham for 43 years, with 23 years of those as course manager. Both Dave and the club wanted to leave Heysham in a strong position going forward, so they've invested heavily over the last few years to achieve this, including extensive drainage work to make the course more playable 52 weeks of the year. That's a story for another day, but for now, on to the ponds and creeks.

At Heysham, a new 5,000 cubic metre irrigation lagoon has been constructed to collect water so that the golf club has a ready supply if (more like when) restrictions are brought in.

Ian Taylor from Arden Lea Irrigation dug this lagoon and shaped all the area around it; he also made sure that any



nearby drainage fell towards the hole so that water collection was maximised.

When you stand on the nearby 18th green, you can clearly see why the lagoon was dug there, and I hate to be an 'obvious Oliver', but that's exactly where you would dig a trap to collect water! Let nature decide and then work with her closely. The lagoon also has outlets to nearby drains for those really heavy downpours that we seem to get more of these days, and a member of the club designed and landscaped one of the outlets. Well done all, I reckon.

Not only that, but wildflower seeds will also be sown to try to attract more insect diversity and to create a more visually pleasing 18th, which could now be described as the course's signature hole. I would love to talk you through the schematics, representations and the other big words associated with a project like this, however, this feature is only a brief outline of an important development that, unless you already have one, may get you thinking about having one, and pretty darned soon.

As with all drainage, irrigation and pretty much any water management, it is best to seek specialist advice prior to breaking ground.

"Most of the work we've undertaken is in anticipation of what may come in the future," Dave told me. "Whatever regulations are brought in, we'll be in a very strong position to adapt."

Dave worked closely with Lancashire County Council to be sure no protected habitat or nearby environments were affected by the works, and guess what? It may be that the club can receive a cash incentive from Natural England to install more. Everyone's a winner here by the looks of it.

Wildlife appears to love this new lagoon too.

"Especially the roe deer who are often seen drinking out of it," mentioned Dave. "Heron and egrets are there most days as well."

No doubt more wildlife will start appearing as the lagoon matures. Here's an interesting fact about egrets: cattle egrets only started breeding in England in 2007, with great white egrets breeding a little later in 2012, both are unquestionably a welcome sight on a golf course wetland. The local amphibian and small fish population may disagree, though.

While the wetland is pretty bland at the moment, I am positive, given the wildlife I know resides at or next to Heysham Golf Club, there will be wagtails, sandpipers and hopefully a kingfisher or two will show up, not to mention the damselfly, dragonfly and butterfly population, which will definitely make an appearance.

But what about the actual pond life itself, the fish, pond snail and other aquatic goodies? Well, they will make their own way there soon enough. It may be a few years before they get there, but they will and usually via the feet of a wading bird (waders accidentally collect fish and amphibian eggs from one pond and then move them to another without even knowing!). Whatever shows up, I'm sure it will be made welcome, just like the rest.

Heysham recently installed an irrigation system too. "Due to the possible restrictions in water usage in

About James Hutchinson

James Hutchinson has spent more than 25 years immersed in the world of golf and ecology. With seven years as BIGGA's resident ecologist, over 480 golf courses visited on behalf of the association and previous roles including environmental officer at St Andrews, James continues to advise clubs across the UK and beyond in a freelance capacity. An R&A Gold Badge Scholar with FdSc and BSc (Hons) credentials, few are better placed to comment on the state of golf course sustainability and the people driving it forward.



“This is unquestionably a project of the utmost importance”

the future, we have installed a new irrigation system this year by Arden Lea Irrigation using the latest Hunter Command Center and sprinklers – all this came to a cost of £300,000,” Dave revealed.

“This year has seen how essential it is investing in a modern irrigation system. In the past we have had to do lots of hand watering on high spots and Mackenzie greens, but this year, even with the dry spell, we haven't had to do any. This is because the sprinklers are so advanced that very little water is wasted thus saving water, which can then be used to irrigate other areas of the course.

“Anthony Whiteside from Arden Lea Irrigation and Wes Henshaw from KARUK LTD were so easy to work with and understood our needs and helped us with this massive project.”

I've been writing about pro greenkeepers, golfers and golf courses for many years now and I love a happy ending to any story. How's this one for size?

Dave said: “The members love this new feature down the left of the 18th now. Ever since it was built, lots of golfers have been seen taking photos of it while playing the last hole. We were also recently awarded ‘Club of the Year’ by Lancashire Golf and also featured on BBC North West highlighting the Dementia Cafe at Heysham and how golf is helping people living with dementia.”

I really can't speak highly enough of Heysham Golf Club. I wish them well in the future, a future that looks bright from where I'm stood, which is just the other side of Morecambe Bay actually.

There are other plans in place, such as potentially hiring or purchasing a water bowser to irrigate those hard-to-reach places on the course, water harvesting via a pump to the irrigation tanks and an aerator to keep algae and other such issues in check. It appears Heysham is in an excellent place to future-proof the site for many years to come. Great work Dave and team! **GI**



The team at Heysham

Dave Hutchinson – course manager
Adam Hutchinson – first assistant greenkeeper
Simon Robinson – greenkeeper
Joel Frith – apprentice greenkeeper
Liam Jackson – apprentice greenkeeper
Henry Brock – apprentice greenkeeper





What if your golf course could anticipate its own needs, adjusting irrigation, predicting turf health and optimising resources before problems arise? Imagine a system that could learn from past conditions, predict what's coming and make real-time recommendations to support decision-making.

While greenkeeping has always been a blend of expertise, science and hands-on experience, today's advancements in data, AI and automation are opening up new possibilities.

With climate uncertainty, rising operational costs and stricter regulations, managing a golf course has never been more complex.

AI and automation are emerging as true assistants, helping greenkeepers save time, use resources more efficiently and elevate traditional practices with data-driven insights.

The golf course of the future will not just be about reacting to conditions – it will be about anticipating them, refining maintenance strategies and ensuring resilience for years to come.

A new era of data collection

The backbone of this transformation is connected hardware and IoT (Internet of Things) technology. Weather stations, soil sensors and automated monitoring devices are making it easier than ever to gather real-time, granular data about course conditions.

How much moisture is in the soil? What is the evapotranspiration rate? When is the best time to irrigate? These questions, once answered through experience alone, can now be reinforced with live data and predictive analytics.

Another promising shift is the role of AI-powered tools in supporting greenkeepers.

While AI cannot (and should not) replace the expertise of those working on the ground, early developments show great potential in automating data collection, logging course conditions, tracking maintenance history and identifying trends in turf health.

These tools reduce the burden of admin tasks, freeing up greenkeepers to focus on proactive decision-making and hands-on course improvements.

The golf course of the future: Smarter, greener, data-driven

Valentine Godin envisages how our courses may be managed in a future where AI, data and automation are at the forefront

Smarter decisions, better outcomes

Having access to data is one thing – knowing how to use it is another. This is where AI-driven analytics come into play. Instead of relying solely on visual assessments, past experiences or manual records, AI can process thousands of data points and provide precise, actionable recommendations:

- Predicting disease outbreaks before they happen, based on local conditions and historical trends.
- Optimising nitrogen applications by analysing turf growth potential rather than following a fixed schedule.
- Balancing water usage to ensure efficient irrigation without waste, even in changing weather conditions.

AI serves as a decision-enhancing tool, providing greenkeepers with real-time insights that help them navigate today's challenges while continuing to apply their expertise where it matters most. Given the increasing pressures of climate change, regulatory demands and the need for efficiency, AI's role in turf management is becoming essential.



About Valentine

Valentine Godin is the founder and CEO of Maya, an AI-powered platform for precision turf and land management trusted by leading golf courses and sports venues worldwide.

With proven experience in engineering leadership and AI implementation, Valentine specialises in translating complex agronomic and environmental data into practical, actionable strategies that greenkeepers can immediately apply.

Her work focuses on making AI and data analytics accessible for turf professionals, helping them leverage connected technology to enhance turf quality, optimise resources and support sustainable management practices while preserving the craftsmanship that defines exceptional course management.

Six tasks ripe for automation

1. Irrigation management

With increasing pressure on golf clubs to use water efficiently, smart irrigation systems can provide the solution, utilising weather data and soil moisture levels to tailor watering schedules, maximise efficiency and reduce waste.

2. Bunker raking

Similar to robotic mowers but with a rake attachment rather than a cutting blade, these handy little machines do exist but aren't yet in common use.

3. Leaf gathering

Not every golf course has trees, but for the many that do – and have them in abundance – the process of clearing leaves is time-consuming. A robot tailored to leaf collection or leaf blowing would alleviate greenkeepers of a much-maligned task.

4. Turf repair

Autonomous machines could perform minor turf repairs, such as filling divots or smoothing out areas with damaged turf.

5. Pest and weed control

Drones or autonomous vehicles equipped with sensors could patrol the course to detect pests or weed growth. Targeted application of pesticides or herbicides could be done more efficiently and precisely, reducing the need for large-scale spraying.

6. Ball retrieval

Automated systems or robots could retrieve lost golf balls from hard-to-reach spots (like water hazards) or as part of a ball-cleaning operation, potentially even bringing the balls back to the clubhouse for reuse.

“The potential benefits for course quality, efficiency and sustainability are hard to ignore”

Fleet and resource management

While much of the focus is on turf health and playing conditions, technology is also reshaping equipment and resource management. Automated fleet tracking and digital maintenance scheduling help clubs reduce downtime, extend the lifespan of their machinery and optimise operational costs.

At the same time, digital inventory systems ensure that fertilisers, pesticides and irrigation products are stocked efficiently, helping clubs avoid overuse, shortages and unnecessary expenses.

These innovations are creating a more transparent line of communication between course managers, committees and club members. By using data to explain decisions, greenkeepers can better align their work with stakeholder expectations and sustainability goals.

A future of precision and stability

As exciting as this future sounds, the transition is still at its early stages. The shift towards data-driven turf management presents both challenges and opportunities.

While AI, automation and connected sensors are already making an impact, greenkeepers must navigate the learning curve, cost of adoption and integration with existing workflows. But given the speed at which technology is advancing, the potential benefits for course quality, efficiency and sustainability are hard to ignore.

The golf course of the future will empower greenkeepers with tools tailored to their own course. It will facilitate faster and smarter decision-making, ensuring that courses can continue to thrive in a world where resources are limited and expectations are higher than ever. **GI**



sisis®

Greens, tees and
fairways maintained with
expertise & passion.



Discover



Pedestrian
Scarifiers

Tractor Mounted
Brushes

Tractor Mounted
Slitters

Tractor Mounted
Aerators

Tractor Mounted
Scarifiers

Our other products include: Slitters | Sweepers | Spreaders/Top Dressers | Hand Tools

For more information or a no obligation demonstration
call **01332 824777** or visit **www.sisis.com**

Proudly part of **Howardson**
Group Ltd

✓ **PLASTIC NETTING FREE**

4

YEARS OF TURF FROM INTURF™

**TOP TURF
EVERY TIME**
INTURF.COM

40
**YEARS OF
INTURF**

**THE BIGGA
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING 2026**

1pm on Wednesday 14 January 2026

Held virtually using an online meeting system,
further details will be distributed to members in
due course.

All BIGGA members are invited to attend and gain
an understanding of the behind-the-scenes work of
the association and its members.

BIGGA
British and International
Golf Greenkeepers Association

The world of greenkeeping

From Italy to India and America to Australia, there are BIGGA members working all over the world

About Kitzbüheler Alpen Westendorf

Elevation: 800m above sea level

Nine-month playing season

Three months under snow cover

Temperature range: +36°C to -20°C

Annual rainfall: 1,200mm

Tucked away in the Austrian Tyrol, Kitzbüheler Alpen Westendorf offers a striking contrast to the traditional settings of many UK courses.

At 800 metres above sea level, the club deals with unique challenges, including snow cover for a quarter of the year, while also serving a tourist-focused market that brings 20,000-25,000 rounds annually.

Derbyshire native Trevor Mitchell is the head greenkeeper there, having first moved to Austria almost 40 years ago.

Can you tell us about your journey into greenkeeping?

I started in 1980 as an apprentice at my local club, Erewash Valley. After six years, I moved to St Andrews to gain links experience and work on European Tour events. In 1987, I came to Austria for my first head greenkeeper position on the grow-in of a new 27-hole project at Schloss Schönborn, north of Vienna. That really shaped my career – grow-ins are a fantastic challenge, and over the years I've managed several, alongside further Tour events in Austria and Germany. I've been at Westendorf for the past 12 years, and it's a very different kind of venue to those earlier roles.

How would you describe the venue and what distinguishes it from other clubs you've worked at?

The location is key. At 800 metres above sea level, we operate with a nine-month season and around three months of snow cover. It's very much a tourist golf concept and we welcome a lot of visiting players during the summer months. That shapes everything we do, from how we set up the course to the expectations we need to meet.

What are the biggest agronomic challenges of maintaining a course in the Tyrolean Alps?

The climate is the overriding factor. We can have temperature swings from +36°C in summer down to -20°C in winter, with prolonged snow cover. Heavy dews and fluctuating conditions mean disease pressure is high – dollar spot is a constant battle. And with 20,000–25,000 rounds each season, wear and tear adds another layer to the challenge.

How do you manage disease pressure in such conditions?

Chemical options are very limited here, so my strategy is mainly cultural. Other than an obligatory preventative spray before the snow arrives in November, I focus on keeping the



Trevor Mitchell

Kitzbüheler Alpen Westendorf, Austria

Grass species

Tees

- Festuca rubra rubra (Rossinante) – 15%
- Festuca rubra trichophylla (Cezanne/Smirna) – 20%
- Lolium perenne (Barsignum, Vesuvius) – 30%
- Poa pratensis (Limousine, Brooklawn) – 30%
- Poa supina (Supranova) – 5%

Fairways & semi-rough

- Festuca rubra commutata (Calliope) – 15%
- Festuca rubra rubra (Rossinante) – 20%
- Festuca rubra trichophylla (Samanta) – 15%
- Lolium perenne (Troya, Dickens 1) – 20%
- Poa pratensis (Limousine, Brooklawn) – 27%
- Poa supina (Supranova) – 3%

Greens

- Agrostis stolonifera (L93, Alpha) – 100%

turf as healthy as possible through the growing season. Dollar spot is our biggest concern, so it's about creating conditions that help the grass resist stress and recover quickly.

And what about water management and irrigation?

We average around 1,200mm of rainfall a year, so the bigger issue is keeping the course dry enough rather than irrigating heavily. That said, we do have a well-fed irrigation system, with light restrictions on usage. Climate change is making itself felt – less snow in winter, and hotter, shorter bursts in summer – so we're keeping a close eye on that. So far, we've not had to exceed our water allowance.

How important is environmental sustainability at Westendorf?

It's playing an ever bigger role. We want to encourage as much nature on the course as possible. We document bird species, wildflowers, butterflies, and other wildlife to highlight the habitats the course supports. We also produce our own honey and have designated wildflower areas for the bees. It's important to demonstrate that golf and biodiversity can go hand in hand.

“It's important to demonstrate that golf and biodiversity can go hand in hand”

What can you tell us about your team?

At its peak we had eight full-time staff, but we now operate with six full-time and two part-time. It's a very international group, hailing from England, Austria, Hungary, and Croatia. That diversity brings different experiences and perspectives, and I'd say the dynamic is one of our strengths. Everyone buys into the same goal of presenting the course at its best.

Looking ahead, what projects or improvements are on the horizon?

There's plenty to keep us busy. Bunker renovations are a priority, along with drainage projects and extending tees to meet demand. As always, we'll balance that with the day-to-day demands of running a busy, seasonal golf course in the Alps. **GI**



Maintaining turf in winter

The value of soil surfactants during cooler seasons

Winter use of soil surfactants

Winter presents a unique set of challenges for turf managers. While golfers continue to expect high-quality playing surfaces, cooler temperatures and slower turf growth make maintaining those standards far more difficult. The focus shifts from producing premium playing conditions to managing drainage, disease and winter wear.

Surfactant technology has been a key part of turf management for over 60 years, commonly used to improve soil moisture control during spring and summer and to combat dry patch. However, the benefits of applying high-quality turf surfactants during autumn and winter are less well known. In fact, the chemistry behind these products can play a crucial role in effective cold-season turf management.

Optimising surface drainage

Around 89% of UK and European golf courses are located on inland sites, where heavier soils are more susceptible to compaction and poor surface drainage compared to sand-based links courses. As a result, most turf managers must look for ways to keep playing surfaces as dry and firm as possible, to extend playability throughout the cooler, wetter months.

In recent years, the use of penetrant wetting agents has increased across the UK and Europe, helping to improve surface infiltration and drainage during late autumn and winter. Aquatrols has invested heavily in research in this area, and the results are compelling.

Proven performance: Dispatch® Sprayable

Independent trials conducted by leading research bodies—including Ohio State University and Cranfield University—have demonstrated the effectiveness of Dispatch Sprayable,

showing that it:

- Significantly increases water infiltration rates
- Reduces surface water run-off on sloped areas

At Ohio State University, a study on bentgrass mown at fairway height on a 4% slope with a loam soil profile found that Dispatch Sprayable reduced run-off by 20% compared to untreated plots. This reduction kept low-lying areas drier and improved overall surface conditions.

In the UK and Europe, many golf greens are positioned on or below slopes, often receiving excess water from surrounds, approaches and fairways. Applying a penetrant wetting agent helps water infiltrate the soil more effectively at the point of contact, reducing run-off onto the green itself. The result is a firmer, drier, more playable surface with less frost or water damage during periods of heavy rainfall.

Avoid penetrant wetting agents that rely on anionic surfactants, as these can cause turf scorch under certain conditions. The advanced chemistry found in all Aquatrols surfactants, including Dispatch Sprayable, ensures safe, year-round application with no risk of turf damage.

Managing turfgrass disease

As winter approaches, turf managers rely on Integrated Turfgrass Management (ITM) strategies to prepare for increased disease pressure. This includes optimising plant health, balancing nutrition, managing organic matter and using fungicides where necessary.

Including Dispatch Sprayable or similar penetrant surfactants in an ITM programme supports these efforts by promoting drier turf surfaces, which are less prone to Fusarium Patch (*Microdochium nivale*) and other moisture-related diseases. With the number and persistence of fungicide chemistries continuing to decline, adopting surfactant-based moisture management provides a valuable,



non-chemical tool to assist with disease reduction.

Enhancing overseeding success

Many turf managers have planned autumn overseeding following the hot, dry periods in May and August which triggered turf thinning and dieback. When overseeding, successful germination and seedling establishment are vital for reestablishing turf density and sward quality. A proven soil surfactant helps overcome any remaining soil water repellency, improves infiltration and ensures even soil wetting to depth - leading to faster, more uniform germination.

Given rising costs, tighter budgets and increasing water-use restrictions, maximising the return on overseeding efforts is more important than ever. Incorporating Aquatrols soil surfactants into your overseeding programme can significantly improve results.

For optimal performance:

- Apply the surfactant two weeks before seeding to condition the soil.
- Follow up three to four weeks after germination to maintain moisture uniformity and promote establishment.

Recommended products:

- Revolution® or Primer Select® for greens and tees
- Dispatch® Sprayable for fairways and roughs

All these products are safe for use on seedling turf without the risk of scorch.

Key benefits of autumn and winter soil surfactant use

- Firmer, drier playing surfaces
- Reduced risk of Fusarium Patch when used within an ITM programme
- Greater overseeding success and seedling survival

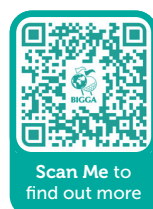
- Faster, more uniform infiltration of rainfall and snowmelt
- Improved playability and reduced frost impact
- Enhanced soil moisture uniformity

In summary

Maintaining high-quality turf surfaces through autumn and winter presents significant challenges due to wetter conditions, slower growth and increased disease pressure. The use of soil surfactants, such as Aquatrols Dispatch Sprayable, provides measurable benefits by improving infiltration, reducing surface water run-off and keeping playing surfaces drier and firmer for longer.

Research from leading institutions has demonstrated the product's effectiveness in enhancing drainage and mitigating saturation issues common on inland courses.

When integrated into a wider turf management programme, surfactants also support disease prevention—particularly against Fusarium Patch—and improve overseeding outcomes by ensuring even soil moisture and improved germination. Overall, autumn and winter surfactant applications are a valuable tool for sustaining turf performance, playability and resilience throughout the colder, wetter months.



The
Aquatrols®
Company

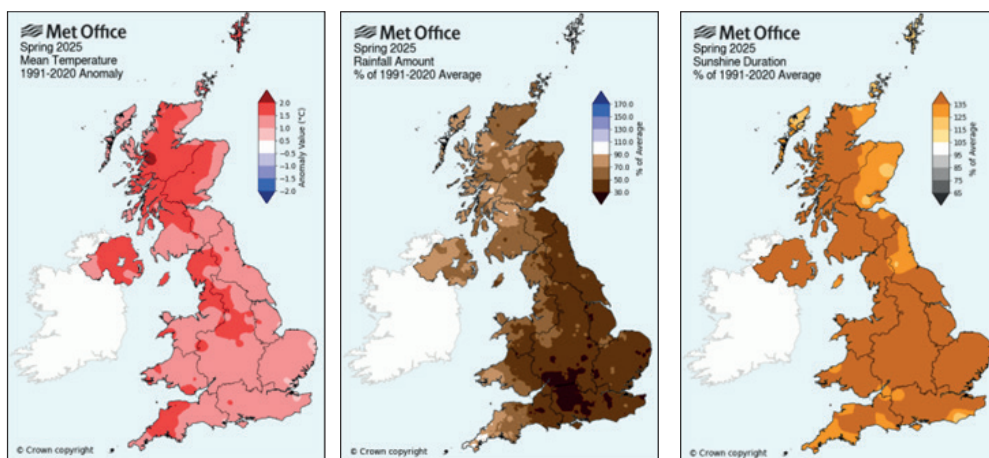
Author: Emma Beggs, Portfolio Manager, The Aquatrols Company

Author: Kelly-Marie Clack, Origin Amenity Solutions

High and dry



What 2025 taught us about turf, moisture and management



2025 has been an interesting year for the greenkeeping world. Spring started off warm, dry and sunny; in fact, it was the sunniest and warmest spring on record for the UK.

This pattern continued into the summer months with warm temperatures, sunny days and less rainfall for most of the UK.

The weather data at Origin Throws Technology Centre is very informative. Dunmow in Essex has received around 320mm of rainfall since January with total evapotranspiration (ET) rates around 850mm. We are still in moisture deficit of over 500mm. ET represents the total water lost from the plant and the soil into the atmosphere. Evaporation is loss of water from the soil surface and transpiration is water released from the plant leaves through pores called the stomata.

Sunlight, air temperature, relative humidity and wind speed determine ET rates. When temperatures increase and sunlight levels increase, ET increases as more water is lost from

the soil and plant. Looking at the Met office summary it is clear why we are still in moisture deficit in certain areas of the UK.

Water conservation is a hot topic at the moment and we have a responsibility to use this valuable resource efficiently. Collecting weather data to understand your forecast and ET rates can help to form your irrigation schedules. Don't forget your moisture meter!

Wilt point

The wilt point on golf greens is the soil moisture level at which turfgrass can no longer get water from the soil and begins to wilt. If you know that wilt begins to visually appear at 15% VMC you always want to be above this to reduce stress on the plant and maintain surface performance. Using a moisture meter will also avoid the over use of water. If the VMC is high, we reduce the amount of air in the soil pore spaces affecting plant and soil health as well as surface firmness.

Moisture balance is a fundamental

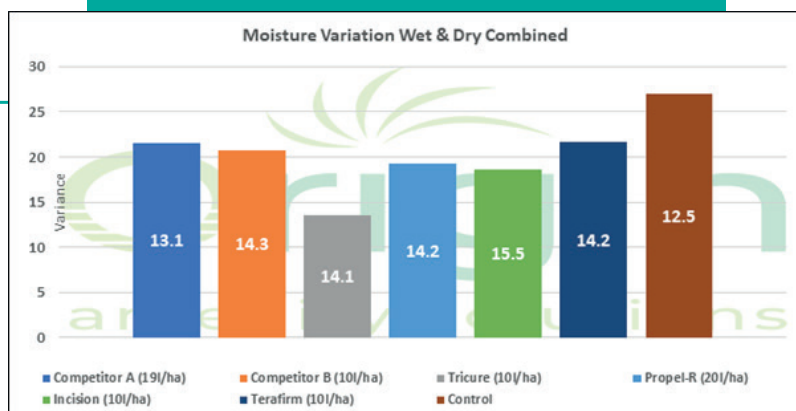
part of managing sports surfaces to maximise performance, reduce plant stress, reduce thatch build up and disease severity. Wetting agents are a key tool to support this.

Wetting agents do a number of things

1. Reduce surface tension. Surface tension is a property of a liquid that causes them to resist spreading out. If you have a low surface tension, water will spread and penetrate through the soil more easily.
2. Reduce the risk of localised dry patch. Soil can become hydrophobic (water repellent) which will affect performance and inhibit plant growth due to lack of water and nutrient.
3. Reduce the water requirements of the soil. By helping the water to spread through the profile and reducing run off and evaporation to optimise plant health and surface performance.

Trial at Origin Throws Technology Centre

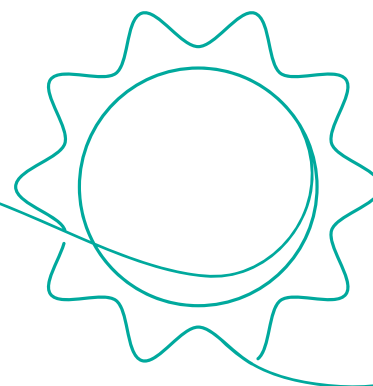
The key points mentioned formed the basis of a trial at Throws, testing different wetting agents at different irrigation levels. Our target VMC was 12-14% and 18-20% on a Poa/Bent, USGA specification Green.



Trial summary:

All plots treated with surfactant showed consistently good quality turf with good coverage. All untreated plots suffered from turf loss, LDS and soil hydrophobicity. Tricure applied at 10l/ha monthly showed significantly higher levels of soil moisture consistency across different irrigation regimes. The difference between the average moisture on the 'high' and 'low' irrigation was only 0.6% yet there was a 31% reduction in irrigation water usage over five months – equivalent to 1mm of irrigation per day, every day for five months.

Consideration should be given to finding 'ideal' soil moisture levels for individual sites and targeting that number to reduce excess irrigation and provide optimum quality playing surfaces. Know your wilt point!

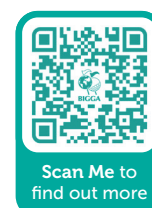


2026 is around the corner!

In some areas of the country rainfall levels have started to increase, but many are still seeing less than average rainfall figures. If this continues we could be starting 2026 in moisture deficit rather than the rainfall positively contributing to groundwater and reservoir levels.

We could see water use restrictions from the water companies very early in the year so priming your soils early with wetting agents, collecting data, and, if you haven't got a moisture meter, now would be the time to consider purchasing.

For tailored advice on managing moisture levels, selecting the right wetting agent or optimising your irrigation strategy, contact the technical team at Origin Amenity Solutions on 0800 138 7222 or email sales@originamenity.com



Managing winter traffic



Jaey Goodchild is an Agronomist
at The R&A

With its ability to recover from wear significantly diminishing during the colder months, protecting turf through the off-season is a huge challenge as the demand for year-round golf continues to rise

As the seasons shift and turf growth slows, the challenge of managing winter traffic becomes increasingly important. For greenkeepers, this presents a critical question: how do we balance access with preservation?

Winter traffic management isn't just about presentation, it's about protecting the long-term health

bentgrass are particularly susceptible to high-traffic stress, especially when growth is limited. Repeated traffic will thin fine turf species, creating opportunities for annual meadow grass to establish. Meadow grass has a multi-annual life cycle and will germinate whenever space becomes available, particularly in autumn and winter.

altogether in certain areas during the winter months. While this can be a difficult call, especially when balancing member expectations, it may be the best way to ensure the course is in peak condition for the main playing season. This may include restricting the use of golf trolleys and buggies.

Sacrificing short-term access for



“Damage sustained during winter can take months to recover, even when proactive recovery work is undertaken in the early season. It often extends well into the spring when golfer expectations are at their highest”

of turf and efficient greenkeeping. Damage sustained during winter can take months to recover, even when proactive recovery work is undertaken in the early season. It often extends well into the spring when golfer expectations are at their highest. Player enthusiasm that comes with the first warm days of the year is often met with frustration if the course is still showing signs of winter stress. This lag in recovery can impact not only turf quality but also the perception of course standards.

One of the most effective strategies is to proactively redirect traffic away from high-stress areas. Green-to-bunker pinch points, tee complexes and path ends are especially vulnerable. These areas receive continual, concentrated footfall, which leads to compaction, thinning and loss of turf coverage.

Fine turf species such as fescue and

Physical barriers such as ropes, stakes, and pegs remain the most reliable tools for traffic control and their movement will allow rotation through wear locations. While signage can support these efforts, we all know that signs are often ignored. Creating clear, visible routes helps guide players intuitively, encouraging better habits over time once the results are seen.

Another valuable approach is to build flexibility into course routing. By offering alternative paths or rotating access points, greenkeeping teams can rest and recover worn areas without significantly disrupting play. This rotational strategy not only protects the turf but also demonstrates a proactive commitment to course care – something many players appreciate when communicated effectively.

In some cases, the most effective decision may be to limit access

long-term quality is a trade-off worth considering, particularly on high-value surfaces like green and tee complexes and fairways.

Ultimately, winter traffic management is about strategic foresight. As my colleagues and I at The R&A often emphasise, strategic planning and clear communication are central to sustainable turf management – especially during the opportunity of off-season. **GI**



Our monthly column from The R&A's Sustainable Golf team shares news and insights on agronomy and sustainability themes. For more information on The R&A's Sustainable Agronomy Service please contact sustainablegolf@randa.org

syngenta®

Explosive Performance

The only contact fungicide



Inspired by nature providing a long lasting protective shield against disease



Syngenta UK Ltd. Registered in England No. 849037.
Jealott's Hill International Research Centre, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG42 6EY

MEDALLION® TL is a Registered Trademark of a Syngenta Group Company. MEDALLION® TL (MAPP 15287, PCS 04188) contains fludioxonil. Always read the label and product information before use. For more information including warning phrases and symbols refer to www.syngentaturf.co.uk © Syngenta February 2025. GQ 13334.

Distributed in the UK and Ireland by ICL Ltd.
Tel: 01473 237123 Email: prof.sales@icl-group.com
Web: www.icl-growingolutions.uk / www.icl-growingolutions.ie



Find out more

Background photo credit: Mark Hollingsworth at Whitley Bay Golf Club.



TriCure AD

Soil Surfactant

Sustainable Moisture Management

TriCure is the most effective and versatile multi-use soil surfactant for preventing and controlling soil water repellency and hydrophobicity. The strength of the product allows it to successfully address repellency problems in the widest range of soil types and in the harshest climates.

