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# Greenkeeper International



## The aftermath of flooding

Graham Down took post following the wettest of winters at Royal Mid-Surrey – this is how he and the team have tackled the recovery

### ■ Practical Greenkeeping

Ecology expert James Hutchinson visits North Hants

### ■ From Your Association

You could present a session at next year's BTME

### ■ Members & Careers

Jordan Fairweather on the transition to becoming a GM



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# Contents

February 2026



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](mailto:membership@bigga.co.uk)  
Letters and editorial enquiries  
[info@bigga.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:d.murphy@18players.com)

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07



11



20



46



48

## First Cut

### 07 • Celtic Manor's green journey

The Welsh resort completes the trio of GEO certified courses

### 08 • 2025 a boom year for golf

England Golf reports a record-breaking year for participation

## From Your Association

### 11 • Proposal to Present

Your chance to present at Continue to Learn at BTME 2027, on a greenkeeping subject of your choice

### 12 • First Green

Answers to the most frequently asked questions about the educational initiative

## Members & Careers

### 20 • Flood recovery

How Royal Mid-Surrey is repairing extensive floodwater damage

### 28 • Career transitioning

Jordan Fairweather discusses how greenkeepers are well-placed for a career as a general manager

### 34 • Obituaries

We pay our respects to BIGGA members who have recently passed away

## Practical Greenkeeping

### 46 • The World of Greenkeeping

Course Manager Joe Curtis on his role at Bodensee Weissensberg in Germany

### 48 • Hunley's wetlands

How wildlife is thriving at the North Yorkshire club

### 52 • Sustainability at North Hants

James Hutchinson looks at the club's progressive approach and its impact on the local environment



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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.



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All you need to know from around our industry

- England Golf reports record-breaking year for participation
- What's on this month - February's key dates for your diary



## Celtic Manor completes trio of GEO Certified courses

**Celtic Manor has reinforced its long-standing commitment to sustainable golf after securing the sport's most respected international environmental accreditation for all three of its courses.**

Having achieved GEO Certification for the Twenty Ten Course last January, the resort has now extended that recognition to its Roman Road and Montgomerie courses.

Sustainability has been embedded within the Newport venue's golf operation since the earliest stages of development. The Roman Road course, opened in 1995, was designed with a reservoir to allow irrigation to be fully self-sustaining — a principle that has continued to shape decision-

making across the resort.

Jim McKenzie, director of golf courses and estates at Celtic Manor Resort, said: "Golf often gets a bad press for its impact on the environment, but we have always had a good story to tell at Celtic Manor.

"Our sustainable journey started with the planning of our very first golf course in the early 1990s, and we began to win formal recognition when the Green Drive initiative was launched for the 2010 Ryder Cup.

"We have made more huge strides in the last two years led by our environment and ecology stewardship manager, Gary Connell, and we are delighted to have won a second GEO Certification in 2025, bringing all

three of our golf courses in line with industry-standard best practices."

Recent progress has included the introduction of an electric golf buggy fleet, reducing annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 89 tonnes to just 8.3 tonnes. Wildflower areas have been established, alongside bug hotels, bird and bat boxes and beehives. The team recently recorded its first sighting of an otter on the Twenty Ten Course.

Carol Kerrey, director of certification and credibility at GEO, added: "Their collective achievements demonstrate strong alignment with the global standard. This recognition reflects not only what they have accomplished, but their continued commitment to leading the way in sustainable golf." **GI**



## The BIGGA Calendar

Alex Lungu, Walton Heath



## A greenkeeper's best friend – Molly and Mabel



**Owner:** Darren Lee (course manager)

**Course:** Salisbury and South Wilts

**Breed:** Cocker spaniels

**Favourite treat:** Leftovers

**Favourite spot:** Sitting on the buggy watching squirrels

**Naughtiest moment:** Chasing squirrels to no avail

**My dogs are happiest:** When jumping in the van to go to work and being made a fuss of by all of the members

## England Golf reports record-breaking year for participation

England's golf courses were busier than ever during 2025, with new figures showing a significant rise in participation and scoring activity.

Figures from England Golf revealed that a total of 11.83 million scores were submitted through the World Handicap System during the year, a 16% increase on 2024 and the highest annual figure since the system began.

While 9-hole golf continued to gain momentum, with submissions rising

systems and staff resources, as teams worked to balance presentation, playability and plant health.

Participation growth was evident across the calendar. Early May proved particularly busy, with Bank Holiday periods among the most active of the year, underlining the importance of course conditioning during high-traffic windows. Female participation also continued to rise, contributing to overall footfall and reinforcing the need for inclusive course setups and flexible playing opportunities.

Richard Flint, chief operating officer at England Golf, said: "Golf really is thriving in England, and the stats are there to back it up. We had a dry, hot summer, so more people wanted to get out on the course, and that clearly fed into participation levels."

While the numbers highlight a healthy appetite for golf, they also underline the central role of greenkeeping teams in sustaining that growth. As participation continues to rise, the challenge for clubs will be ensuring that course standards can be maintained sustainably, even as playing pressure and climatic extremes become increasingly familiar features of the season. **GI**

**Golf really is thriving in England"**

by 28%, 18-hole scores were up 14% year-on-year. General play also remained a major driver of activity, increasing by 26%.

For greenkeepers, these figures were delivered against the backdrop of a prolonged and at times challenging playing season. A dry and often hot summer encouraged golfers onto courses in greater numbers, extending peak-season conditions well into the shoulder months. However, these conditions placed additional pressure on turf management, irrigation





## What's on this month

Dates for your diary

**2 February**

BIGGA & BAGMA drinks reception – Orlando

**10 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– Worthing GC

BIGGA Scotland Professional Leadership  
Programme, Coaching & Mentoring Workshop –  
Auchterarder GC

**11 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– Gerrards Cross GC

**12 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– Ransomes Jacobsen, Ipswich

**17 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– London GC

**18 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– Ingrebourne Links

**19 February**

BIGGA SE Region Management Training Workshop  
– Windlesham GC

**24 February**

BIGGA Scotland Conference – Carnegie Conference  
and Events Centre, Dunfermline

**27 February**

BIGGA SE Region Golf & Dinner Day – Walton Heath  
GC



Ingrebourne Links



## BIGGA Regional Patrons 2025

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# From your Association

Representing the greenkeeping community

- Frequently asked questions about the First Green education initiative
- CEO Jim Croxton on BIGGA's clear vision for the future of greenkeeping



- All Proposal to Present submissions must be made through the online application form
- Your Proposal to Present must be completed in full before it will be considered for the Continue to Learn at BTME 2027 education programme
- Viability of proposals will be considered based on their content; cost to deliver the event and interest shown by members
- All viable proposals will be made available to the BIGGA membership to vote for the education they would most like to see at Continue to Learn at BTME 2027

## Get involved: Your chance to present at BTME 2027

This is your chance to help shape greenkeeper education by submitting a 'Proposal to Present' for Continue to Learn at BTME 2027.

Continue to Learn is recognised as the premier education event outside the USA for those working within the greenkeeping and sports turf industry.

There is a wide range of agronomic and practical learning on offer, alongside a host of educational offerings on relevant subjects, including leadership, mental health awareness and career progression.

Once submissions are received, BIGGA members will be asked to vote on the topics they wish to see on the education programme via the Members' Choice survey, which will shape the agenda for 2027.

Anyone who has a topic and wishes to present can make a submission, whether you are a greenkeeper, a turf educator, employed in the industry or even if you have never worked in turf before but have a proposal that could benefit BIGGA members.

You may be an experienced speaker or

this could be your first time addressing a crowd – all submissions are welcome.

Selected core education content will feature in the programme along with fresh ideas and presenters, providing new angles and insight on a huge variety of topics, ensuring Continue to Learn maintains its position as the sports turf industry's most influential annual event. Submissions are open now and close on 10 April. **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 John Wells BIGGA Chairperson Steven Lloyd





INSPIRE THE  
NEXT GENERATION



## First Green FAQs

Workforce Project Manager Jenny Bledge answers the questions she is often asked about the initiative

**Hosting a First Green field trip is a great way to engage students in STEM learning while showcasing the role of greenkeepers.**

Many of you have shown an interest in this initiative and here are some of the most common questions I find myself answering.

### **What does a typical event look like?**

A field trip lasts 2-3 hours with multiple activity stations run by a greenkeeper or volunteer offering hands-on learning.

### **How much time and effort does it take to host?**

Preparation mainly involves co-ordinating with the school and creating the agenda. BIGGA provides structured lesson plans and materials for our members to simplify the whole process.

### **Which activity stations should I start with?**

We offer 13 lesson plan guides, but great starter stations include Cool Tools, Soils, Calculating Areas and How Far Does the Ball Roll. You can also create your own using our guides as a reference.

### **What about insurance and risk assessments?**

Your golf club's public liability insurance covers all on-site activities, including this event. Schools have their own cover for educational visits but may request proof for risk assessments. All lesson plans we provide include risk assessments to share with school staff.

### **Do I need any special equipment?**

Most activities use equipment already available on the golf course, such as soil probes, water testing kits and course maintenance tools. Laminated worksheets, clipboards and dry-wipe markers are also useful.

### **Do the team need a DBS/Disclosure check?**

No, a check is only required if you plan to visit a school regularly and lead events independently, without school staff present.

Many clubs hold SafeGolf accreditation, adding an extra layer of security for schools and parents.

### **What if my team are hesitant to take part?**

That's OK! Many greenkeepers quickly adapt and enjoy leading activities. Our lesson plans and toolkit provide support and some clubs find hosting is a great team-building exercise.

### **How do I get schools involved?**

Many schools seek unique field trips and First Green aligns with their curriculum. Secondary schools list Careers Advisors on their websites, so start there. For primary schools, contact the school office to find the best person to speak with.

### **What about bad weather?**

Field trips can run in various conditions. Plan for shelter, waterproof activities and advise students on suitable clothing. Some clubs use gazebos or umbrellas to keep stations dry.

### **Can hosting a field trip benefit my club?**

Absolutely! Many clubs report increased interest in greenkeeping careers, positive local press coverage and stronger relationships with the community. It's also a great way to showcase your club's commitment to sustainability and education. **GI**

### **About First Green**

First Green is an innovative environmental science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education outreach programme using golf courses as hands-on learning labs.

The initiative aims to introduce young people to the career opportunities available in golf and showcase the skills required for these roles. In doing so, First Green hopes to inspire the next generation of greenkeepers.

**Get involved by scanning the QR code**





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The **BIGGA** Picture



With  
Jim Croxton, CEO

# A clear vision for the future of greenkeeping

Our latest announcements reflect a cohesive strategy to support greenkeepers and elevate standards across the industry

BTME is our championship week and a moment to set out, clearly and confidently, what BIGGA exists to do and how we intend to support greenkeepers as the profession continues to evolve. We have been striving to make that purpose unmistakable, and a series of announcements made during the week in Harrogate marked an important step forward for the association.

These are not isolated developments but exist as a connected programme of initiatives that define our direction and ambition for the years ahead. At the centre of this work sits BIGGA's refined three-year strategy. Shaped by input from members, employers and partners across the industry, it has provided clarity not only on priorities, but on purpose.

That thinking is captured in a new strapline that now underpins our activity: We support greenkeepers through education, recognition and community to enhance course quality and to continually elevate the

game of golf.

That statement provides a benchmark for decision-making and direction. If BIGGA supports greenkeepers effectively – through better training, stronger networks and meaningful recognition – then standards on the ground improve. When course quality improves, facilities benefit and the game of golf itself is elevated.

**“We have developed a clear, five-level education pathway... from entry level through to course management”**

That cause-and-effect relationship sits at the heart of the strategy and explains why the current programme

of work looks the way it does.

One of the most significant developments is a fundamental rethink of the education and training pathway for greenkeepers.

For many years, progression has been inconsistent and unclear. A typical journey might include an initial qualification and, for some, a further step beyond that, before the pathway becomes fragmented or disappears altogether. Too often, greenkeepers have been left to follow informal routes or simply mirror the careers of those around them.

In response, we have developed a clear, five-level education pathway that sets out progression from entry level through to course management. For the first time, the profession will be able to point to a coherent structure showing how an individual can move from having no experience of greenkeeping to becoming a fully qualified and competent course manager. Importantly, from 2026 there will be formal training provision available at every stage, ensuring





long-standing gaps in education and development are addressed.

A key part of delivering that ambition is BIGGA's status as a Lantra Customised Training Provider. This allows the association to develop and deliver bespoke training that is tailored specifically to the needs of greenkeepers, while having that training independently quality-assured and accredited by Lantra.

It provides industry recognition, external quality assurance and enhanced learner credibility, while allowing BIGGA to retain control of content and ensure it remains relevant to the profession.

The pathway begins with a new introductory level, the Kickstart Initiative, designed to provide a genuine entry point into greenkeeping and to support clubs looking to attract and develop new people.

At the other end of the pathway, we will introduce a Professional Leadership Programme, aimed at bridging what is widely regarded as the most challenging step in a

greenkeeper's career: the transition from practitioner to manager. Delivered predominantly online, the programme reflects modern working realities while maintaining clear professional standards. Alongside learning and development, we are also modernising our membership offer to better reflect the way clubs and facilities now operate. We will introduce team membership options, allowing entire greenkeeping teams to engage collectively and benefit from a broader package of support.

In addition, a new free, entry-level offer is being developed for lower-budget clubs and facilities that currently have little or no engagement with BIGGA. This will provide access to basic tools and guidance, introduce clubs to the value of professional support, and offer a practical route into deeper involvement when resources allow.

A healthcare offering for members will also form part of an enhanced benefits package, reinforcing our ongoing focus on welfare and

wellbeing.

Recognition remains a central pillar of the association's work. As part of this, we have reached an agreement with STRI Group to take ownership and management of the Golf Environment Awards. These will be integrated into BIGGA's wider awards programme, with the refreshed awards launching in 2026 and presented in 2027, ensuring that excellence in environmental stewardship continues to be recognised and celebrated.

All of this activity is taking place from a position of strength. Membership numbers are at their highest level for more than 20 years, reflecting growing engagement and confidence in the direction of travel. The focus now is not simply on growth, but on improving the quality, relevance and impact of what BIGGA provides.

Further detail on each of these initiatives will follow in due course. Taken together, however, they represent a clear statement of intent to deliver for our members. **GI**



# Welcome to our new members

## International

**Tyler Sorenson (A)**  
Turf Equipment & Irrigation  
Inc, USA

.....  
**David Kiger (A)**  
TurfNet, USA

.....  
**Cory Troyer (I)**  
Harrison Lake CC, USA

.....  
**Justin Woodland (I)**  
Airgronomics LLC, USA

.....  
**André Silva (I)**  
**Ricardo Fernandes (I)**  
Oitavos Dunes - Quinta da  
Marinha, Portugal

## Scotland

**Niall McLaren (AGK)**  
**Sean Jencik (GK)**  
**Hannah Isinghood (GK)**  
St Andrews Links Trust

.....  
**Calum Anderson (HGK)**  
Fraserburgh

.....  
**Rongxue Xu (T)**  
SRUC (Elmwood)

## South East

**Freddie Swinburn (APP)**  
Haverhill

.....  
**Luke Du Plooy (AGK)**  
Thetford

.....  
**Leon Pearce (AGK)**  
Wisley

.....  
**Sean Carter (AGK)**  
Maylands

.....  
**Owen Wilkinson (AGK)**  
Royal St George's

.....  
**Joel Hall (GK)**  
Crowborough Beacon

.....  
**Callum Corey (GK)**  
Wentworth Club

.....  
**Steven Race (GK)**  
Woodbridge

## Northern Ireland

**Simon Beggs (GK)**  
Kingfisher Country Estate

## Central

**Robert Rouse (APP)**  
Oundle

.....  
**Liam Rayment (APP)**  
Ramsey Golf & Bowls Club

.....  
**Harrison Butcher (AGK)**  
**Sam Ayles (AGK)**  
Luffenham Heath

.....  
**Christian Yeates (AGK)**  
Frilford Heath

.....  
**Gregory Hunt (DHGK)**  
**Stephen Birkett (GK)**  
Druids Heath

.....  
**Chris Dodds (GK)**  
**Robert Stewart (GK)**  
Wentworth Club

## Northern

**Chris Lee (APP)**  
Hindley Hall

.....  
**Josh Fairhurst (AGK)**  
Prestbury

**Lewis Jones (AGK)**  
Lincoln

.....  
**Lewis Jeffels (AGK)**  
**Simon Colley (CM)**  
**Mark Dring (M)**  
**Daniel Harris (GK)**  
Oulton Hall

## South West & South Wales

**Tommy Bradshaw (AGK)**  
Newquay

.....  
**Haydn Payne (AGK)**  
Wessex Golf Centre

.....  
**Nigel Chamberlain (GK)**  
**Les Fletcher (GK)**  
Manor House GC at Castle  
Coombe

.....  
**Michael Warren (GK)**  
Oake Manor





Royal St George's 18th



# BIGGA

## CPD

Continuing Professional Development

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

David Edmondson, Prestwick

Joe Iplady, Ganton

Kate Stillwell, GKG (Golf club of Kópavogur and Garðabær), Iceland

Bradley Taylor, Beau Desert

Marcus Davies, Royal

Emma Reeves, St Andrews Links Trust

Craig Boath, Carnoustie Golf Links

Danny Gallagher, Tydd St Giles Golf

Dean Harrison, Hurlston Hall G&CC

Andrew Wilson, Whitecraigs



Ganton 14th

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

Joe Iplady, Ganton

Craig MacEachen, Murcar Links

Craig Boath, Carnoustie Golf Links

Danny Gallagher, Tydd St Giles Golf

Alan FitzGerald CGCS MG, Rehoboth Beach CC, USA



Carnoustie Golf Links

#### Key

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





**FIRST GREEN**



GCSAA



BIGGA

# INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF GREENKEEPERS HOST A STEM FIELD TRIP



Discover more about how  
First Green turns golf courses  
into classrooms.

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# Members & Careers

Where we meet your fellow turf professionals and share their stories

- Course Manager Graham Down on flood recovery at Royal Mid-Surrey
- Why greenkeepers can be great candidates for general management roles



## Embracing retirement – tips from a former greenkeeper who is doing it right

**Retirement represents a significant milestone in anyone's life, but it can be a hard thing to get to grips with, especially for greenkeepers.**

Years of early mornings, physical work and the responsibility of delivering high standards create a strong sense of identity, and stepping away from the course can feel unsettling. Meurig Lumley's early experience of retirement shows that, with the right approach, it can also be a positive and fulfilling new chapter.

After 41 years at Aberdovey, Meurig retired in June 2025. While he admits to missing certain aspects of the job, he has found the ingredients to a satisfying post-work life.

"I think the thing is to keep active," he said. "I've not stopped since I retired."

Gardening, walking and a brief flirtation with running have helped Meurig maintain his fitness, while his ongoing involvement with the RNLI provides purpose and routine without the pressure of full-time work.

"All of that keeps me busy," he said. "But what's also important is having time now to spend with the family. My son plays the drums and I've been his roadie a few times. I also have a little granddaughter – taking care of a two-year-old certainly keeps you fit!"

Maintaining social contact is important, and helps avoid isolation.

"It's important to be around people and I'm fortunate to have been made an honorary member of the club, so I'm able to play golf and still see the same people I did when I was

working," said Meurig.

While the structure of the working week disappears, creating a new rhythm helps retirement feel settled, rather than aimless.

"You still make plans" he said. "But you have freedom to decide on the day how you'd like to spend it."

However, some old habits remain.

"I still wake up very early," Meurig revealed. "It's the body clock."

Retirement does not mean severing ties with the profession either, as Meurig still has the opportunity to share his experience.

"I've said to the team there I'm happy to answer any questions," he said.

"There's no point keeping what you learn to yourself. I'm always free to pass on anything I've learned." **GI**



An aerial photograph of a golf course at dawn. The landscape is shrouded in a thick, soft mist that hangs over the green fairways and clusters of trees. The light is diffused, creating a serene and somewhat somber atmosphere. In the distance, a small, traditional-style pagoda or tower is visible through the haze. The foreground shows the dark, silhouetted branches of trees, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting.

# After the flood

Graham Down arrived in post as Royal Mid-Surrey was tentatively recovering from the impact of flooding – this is how he and team have tackled the situation









**When Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club suffered repeated flooding after a breach in the Thames riverbank last October, the disruption touched every corner of the organisation.**

For members, it meant almost a full year of golf restricted to a composite layout, with six holes having been compromised. For the club, it brought financial pressure, operational challenges and uncertainty over the scale of the eventual restoration.

Into that picture stepped Course Manager Graham Down, who arrived in the summer with significant project-management experience and a clear understanding that the job would demand both patience and decisiveness.

His appointment followed a period during which major works were already in motion, including a second-phase bunker renovation and a multi-fairway drainage project. The club had been recognised for its sustainability credentials, earning Environmental Golf Club of the Year, and the greenkeeping team had been brilliantly led in difficult circumstances by the previous Course Manager Gavin Kinsella MG.

But the impact of the breach was still apparent, with much work to be done. Now, with repairs to the riverbank completed and the club working closely with agronomists and local authorities, attention is turning towards full recovery.

The aim is to restore two full courses to their former glory, strengthen resilience and then push performance standards to match the strength of the region's renowned golfing landscape.

### **How and when did the move to Royal Mid-Surrey come about?**

I was contacted by a recruiter who asked whether I'd be interested. I wasn't sure at first, but he explained that the club was about to embark on a major bunker renovation, with the second half still to be done.

It's a club with the resources to push forward and had just dealt with a breach of the Thames, so there were meaningful projects to get stuck into. I'd done a bunker project at Harewood and knew both the enjoyment and the impact it brings.

I met the general manager, got on well, and it felt like somewhere I could work. I also knew Gavin had been here nearly 20 years, so that told me it must be a good place.

Location mattered too: I live in Beaconsfield, my children are in excellent local schools and I needed to stay in the area. Financially, geographically and in terms of the type of course, it all lined up.

### **What sort of projects were already under way when you arrived?**

The bunker project, a drainage project and reinstatement work after the flooding were all teed up before I started. Most of the background work had been done by Gavin and the general manager, so my job was to find my feet quickly and then project manage. My previous experience with bunker reconstruction and building the academy and range at Bocket Hall definitely helped. It's really been about communication with the contractors and delivering what was already planned.

### **Career timeline**

**2010-2014:**  
Oakland Park,  
head greenkeeper

**2014-2017:**  
Aldwickbury Park,  
course manager

**2017-2024:**  
Harewood Downs,  
course manager

**2024-2025:**  
Bocket Hall,  
course manager

**2025-present:**  
Royal Mid-Surrey,  
course manager





**“I’ve spent a lot of time observing since August and I’m now in a much more confident place”**



## A proud tradition of conservation

Royal Mid-Surrey’s success in being named the 2025 UK Environmental Golf Club of the Year reflects a long-term commitment to conservation that Graham is keen to uphold.

More than half of the club’s acreage is natural habitat, including wetlands, acid grassland and a rare pocket of wet woodland that has earned the site its SINC designation. These areas are managed to encourage ecological diversity, with carefully balanced wetland maintenance, wildlife corridors created through eco-rough, and ongoing guidance from specialist ecologists and neighbouring Kew Gardens.

That approach extends seamlessly into day-to-day turf operations. Inputs are kept deliberately low, with regular soil sampling guiding any targeted treatment. Cut-and-collect regimes protect species diversity in roughs, while hybrid and battery-powered machinery helps reduce emissions across the estate.

Water efficiency is another defining strength. A bore-fed irrigation system, supported by four large storage tanks, ensures resilience in dry periods. Precision is central: upgraded nozzles, app-controlled scheduling, POGO moisture mapping and weather-station data allow water to be used only where and when it’s needed.

The club’s circular approach to waste is equally robust. Everything from hollow cores and chipped branches to coffee grounds and kitchen cuttings is reused or composted on site, while single-use plastics have been dramatically reduced through refill schemes and sustainable product choices.

These efforts sit within a broader culture of sustainability. GEO certification, solar generation, EV charging, community partnerships, awareness events and member engagement initiatives all reinforce a club striving to protect its environment and demonstrate best practice.

## When you follow someone of long standing, how do you introduce your own way of working?

I take things steadily. I come in, get to know everyone, see where they’re strong and where improvements might be made. Because Gavin had been here so long, there were good protocols and good training in place. The two head greenkeepers had a tough summer with the weather, so my role was to support them and help going into autumn without upsetting the apple cart. I’ve been fortunate that the foundations were already very good.

## Can you describe what you inherited in terms of the site and the impact of the riverbank breach?

Last October was a very wet autumn. We border the Thames, and alongside the riverbank is the towpath, then a ha-ha – a long, ancient ditch that collects drainage water from the course. We’re in the floodplain, so when the tide





Thank a Greenkeeper Day at Royal Mid-Surrey

is very high, water comes over the towpath, fills the ha-ha and floods the course and Old Deer Park next door. Normally that water recedes into the ha-ha and drains back into the Thames through culverts at low tide. But over time the culverts had blocked, and with the pressure behind them, a 20-metre hole blew out in the riverbank. After that, water came in twice a day regardless of tide height. It mostly affected the Taylor Course but also parts of the Barton. The club had to operate a composite course for most of the year. Members handled it well, but it was a big hit. New memberships and guest play were stopped, societies cancelled and there were financial implications. Responsibility for the repair was clarified as the council's, and the work has cost millions. Now we're assessing what needs to be done to put the bottom holes back together. The questions include soil condition, compaction and what can be salvaged. Realistically, we won't see full recovery until spring.

#### What does the recovery process look like on the ground?

We're still evaluating. The new culverts work but differently to the old ones, so we're monitoring water levels closely. Several ponds in the low area connect to the ha-ha, and their levels are fluctuating. We need to understand where that settles before making decisions. We're working with Paul Woodham and The R&A, with Gordon Howat designing the drainage project. There's silt deposition, reeds where fairways used to be and a lot of debris washed in from the Thames. We're considering scraping, aeration, decompaction, overseeding – whatever is appropriate once we know the baseline.

#### How do you approach communication with members around such a significant long-term project?

I work closely with the general manager, who issues weekly updates. When I arrived, I sent an email outlining my first impressions – mainly how welcoming everyone had been,





“Realistically, we won’t see full recovery until spring”

which was absolutely genuine. There’s a daily update on course status through the IG app. We’ve spoken about a WhatsApp group like the one I used at Brocket, where I’d send daily videos from the course, but they want to make sure it’s right for Royal Mid-Surrey before deciding.

#### Do the two courses have distinct agronomic characteristics?

The land is similar, but the Taylor greens were reconstructed as USGA-spec sand-based greens during Gavin’s time. The Barton greens are old soil push-ups and much smaller – under a hectare compared with 1.2–1.5 hectares on the Taylor. Nutrition programmes will be adjusted accordingly.

The smaller soil greens should retain nutrients better, so there will be differences. I’ve spent a lot of time observing since August, and I’m now in a much more confident place about how they react.

#### Has staffing been affected by having holes out of action?

Although six holes were affected, in some cases it was just certain areas so the team has still had to cut the greens and maintain areas whenever conditions allowed. Bird damage has been a big issue because the lack of golfer traffic left leatherjackets and worms exposed. We’ve tackled that with a falconer using birds of prey, which has worked really well and avoids less sustainable measures. Geese are another challenge, and this approach has helped there too. Other local clubs have been in touch because they’re interested in doing the same.

#### How embedded are you in the club’s wider strategic decision-making?

Very embedded. I’m a key decision-maker on anything involving the golf course, involved in water working groups, greens committees and other areas of the club. That was similar at Harewood and Brocket, and I expect it will develop in the same direction here.





The team at Royal Mid-Surrey

#### How do you see the club once recovery work is complete?

Given where we are in south-west London, the competition is incredibly strong. There are many high-end courses with excellent course managers, so we need to be right up there. We have the resources and the team to achieve that. It's about professional pride as much as anything. I want this to be known as one of the best courses in the area, respected by peers and something members are proud

to show off. They've spent the last year showing visitors what's gone wrong. It will be good to reach the point where they're showing them how well everything has been rebuilt. The positivity here has really stood out. At a recent dinner, even after the breach, the loss of holes and Gavin leaving, everyone was upbeat and looking ahead. That's a really positive environment to work in. **GI**

#### 'Horses for courses'

Graham has worked across a variety of setups, from small family-run operations to major groups and private members' clubs, and says each brings its own rewards and challenges.

"My first course manager's role was at a very small, family-run proprietary club, Oakland Park. It was a great grounding, and I learned so much there," he said. "Then I went to Aldwickbury Park, which was part of the Burhill Group. That brought a completely different dynamic – the scale of a multi-course business, the buying power and some amazing training opportunities. After that I moved to Harewood Downs, a private members' club, and spent eight years there through the Covid period and the boom that followed. That was much more about committees, boards and working closely with the general manager.

"Brocket Hall followed – still proprietary but foreign-owned – which came with its own challenges. You couldn't always contact the owner, depending on whether they were in the country, and it was a much more corporate model, especially with the tournaments we hosted.

"Now I'm back at a members' club at Royal Mid-Surrey. At the moment, I'm firmly in the private members' club camp. There's often a bit more pride within the membership and, in a well-run club, investment tends to go where members want it – usually the golf course – rather than being driven purely by return on investment.

"It really is horses for courses. There are pros and cons to every model, but I've taken something valuable from all of them."



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# Are you ready to become a GM?

Jordan Fairweather explains why greenkeepers may be better prepared for general management than they think

Career progression in greenkeeping is often viewed through a narrow lens, culminating in becoming course manager or perhaps director of agronomy. But as the skill sets of those in the profession continue to diversify, it's becoming increasingly apparent that many could continue that journey beyond traditional roles and into the world of general management.

Jordan Fairweather's career offers a compelling example. Having started out as an irrigation engineer at Loch Lomond before building an international CV that spans construction projects, multi-course oversight and senior leadership roles, he has now taken on the general manager position at Pravets Golf Club in Bulgaria.

It is a move that, on the surface, might appear a significant leap. In reality, it is a natural progression for someone who has spent years proactively developing his understanding of the wider business of golf.

Here, he explains how greenkeeping experience translates into business leadership, why greenkeepers should not underestimate their broader value, and what practical steps you can take if you aspire to tread a similar path.

## Can you start by outlining your new role and what you are responsible for at Pravets?

I'm based in Bulgaria, about 45 minutes outside Sofia, at an 18-hole golf course owned by a hospitality group that also owns seven Hyatt-branded hotels in the country. The golf club is a relatively small part of their wider portfolio, so they were looking for someone to come in and effectively run it for them.

My role is general manager, so I oversee everything golf-related: revenue streams, agronomy, sales and sponsorship, guest satisfaction and overall business performance. We also look after some football pitches for the Bulgarian Football Union, which isn't a major part of the business but is obviously helpful given my background.

Previously, there hadn't really been much emphasis on a long-term vision. The focus had been year by year – how much revenue can we make this season? The structure has now changed, with a board of directors in place, so my job

is to align the golf club with their strategic objectives and build a longer-term plan.

The reality is the club doesn't currently make money. In a country with a small golfing population – there are only around 700 registered golfers and six courses nationwide – the long-term goal is to break even. Short-term, it's about growing international rounds, increasing incremental revenue, and retaining our existing members. Agronomy plays a big role in that, but so does retail, member benefits and the overall experience. There's a lot going on at once.

## You have history at Pravets. How did this role come about?

I was the superintendent here when the course first opened, around 15 years ago. In my career I've done a few construction projects and pre-openings, and often the agronomist is the first person on site. You're there before the golf professional, the director of golf or the general manager, and you end up involved in pre-ordering, setting up systems and even signing off contracts.

Usually, I'd deal with that and then move on after another six months or so, but in this case it was a bit different as I ended up getting married here and Bulgaria became our home base wherever my career took us. Even after I left, I stayed in touch with the owner – a Christmas message, that sort of thing. Last summer he called me and asked whether I'd ever consider moving back permanently. He knew my family were already in Bulgaria for schooling reasons.

They didn't need a superintendent as they already had one, but he said, "I want you to come in and run everything". There was a trust factor there, and he'd seen how my career had progressed. I'm not the same person I was 15 years ago, professionally or personally. Everything aligned, and when the right move comes along, you take it.

## How have you managed that dynamic with the existing superintendent, given your background?

I knew straight away that the superintendent was the key relationship to get right. Here's how I dealt with it: I came in, put my hand on his shoulder and said, 'All those







machines you've been trying to win, that extra budget for grass seed you've been fighting for — before, you were selling that to the director of golf, and he was trying to sell it to ownership. Now you're selling it to me, and I'm selling it to the board and ownership.'

You can imagine a non-agronomist trying to justify €180,000 worth of equipment. What I said to him was, 'I'm going to take the stress off your back. You've got an ally now — someone who understands what you're going through, the pressures a greenkeeper is under. I've got your back.'

I also told him that, for now, I was going to leave him to get on with it. I've got a lot of other areas of the business to get my head around, and the club isn't profitable yet. We need to grow revenue before we can support additional spend or increased budgets.

From an agronomy point of view, I can look at a green and quickly know what's in

good condition, what isn't, or whether there's disease. That allows me to spend less time on the course right now and more time on the areas the business needs to grow. In the early weeks, agronomy has probably been the smallest part of the role.

### What has changed in you over the last 15 years to make you a credible general manager now?

For me, it comes down to understanding both back of house and front of house.

Agronomy is traditionally back of house — members and guests rarely see that side directly. Over the last 15 years, I've worked hard to understand how front of house operates, because that's what gives you a complete picture of the business.

At bigger clubs, you start getting invited into monthly business review meetings. You sit in and listen to how sales and marketing plans are

### Transferrable skills

- Cost control and budgeting — managing one of the largest cost centres in the club
- Leadership — leading large, diverse teams
- Planning — adapting programmes to weather, competitions and resources
- Asset management — overseeing high-value machinery fleets and maintenance schedules
- Time management — balancing operational, administrative and communication demands



“If you're curious, you ask questions.  
That's how you grow”



built, how pricing strategies work, how yield management is calculated. If you're curious, you ask questions. That's how you grow.

One of the biggest pieces of advice I'd give is that you have to put yourself forward. Everyone is busy, but if you want to learn, you need to ask. I've been fortunate that many general managers and directors of golf I've worked with have been open and willing to share information when I showed interest.

In some cases, I took on responsibilities that weren't technically in my job description, just to be taken more seriously and to learn. Over time, that led to invitations to board meetings and strategic discussions.

I wouldn't say I'm the best general manager out there, and front of house will never be my strongest area, but I can read a profit and loss statement, justify return on investment to an owner and understand guest satisfaction data. Those skills came from exposure and willingness to learn.

**For course managers who don't have that exposure, are there transferable skills they may be overlooking?**

Definitely. Cost control and budgeting is a big one.

Agronomy is usually the biggest cost centre in a golf club after utilities. The difference is there's no direct revenue attached to it, but from a budgeting perspective,

superintendents already manage huge budgets.

People management is another. The agronomy team is often the largest department, so leadership and team management skills are already there.

Planning is huge. Agronomists plan around weather, competitions and resources constantly. That's no different from planning a marketing campaign or a sales strategy – you just apply it differently.

Asset management is massive. Turf equipment fleets can be worth €1.5–3 million. Managing maintenance schedules, replacement cycles and preventative care translates directly to managing buildings, carts or clubhouse infrastructure.

And finally, time management. Balancing office work, course time, communication and now even social media is something greenkeepers already do well. Many just don't recognise it as a transferable skill.

**How important is it to accept uncertainty when stepping into a broader role?**

It's essential. There are systems here I've never used before – tee booking systems, finance software – so I'm asking the pro shop staff to show me how things work. You have to be open to that.

The same applies to legislation and local regulations. There are things done here that I wouldn't do elsewhere, but when



Jordan, right, at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi



you understand the legal context, it makes sense. You have to be open-minded and willing to learn.

You can't micromanage everything. You need to surround yourself with strong people and accept that there will always be skills you need to develop.

### Is variety of experience important for those aspiring to senior management?

Yes, but it doesn't have to mean different countries. I think working under different ownership and business models is more important. Member-owned clubs, privately owned clubs, green fee operations – they all function differently.

If you can experience more than one model, particularly private ownership, you tend to learn more about how decisions are made and how assets are managed. That exposure is valuable.

### What role has education played in your progression?

I've never done a formal club management qualification, although I considered the Club Managers Association of Europe programme. Timing never worked with my family.

What I have done is a lot of online learning – LinkedIn Learning, Coursera – particularly around finance and business. I also completed Troon Golf's leadership programme, which involved working across different departments.

One of the most valuable experiences I had was spending two days shadowing a food and beverage director at a Hyatt hotel. I used holiday time to do it. It cost me nothing more than a bottle of wine, but I learned principles that apply across the whole business.

If people are willing to put themselves out there, especially in the winter, there are plenty of opportunities to shadow colleagues and learn.

### Looking back, did you deliberately engineer this path?

Not initially, but over time it became clearer that this is the way I wanted to go. I started enjoying asset management and planning more than the day-to-day agronomy tasks. I found myself ordering furniture, managing cart fleets and dealing with service contracts.

Managing multiple properties was a turning point. Once you're overseeing several sites, you have to focus on the bigger picture. That experience really helped develop my leadership and commercial understanding.

### Finally, do you think greenkeepers are underrepresented in general management?

I do. I genuinely believe agronomists are as well placed as anyone to manage a golf club. We've just underestimated ourselves.

Traditionally, the path has been golf professional to director of golf to club manager. But greenkeepers manage the biggest budgets, the biggest teams and the biggest assets. Ownership groups don't always understand agronomy, and having someone in charge who does can actually reduce risk.

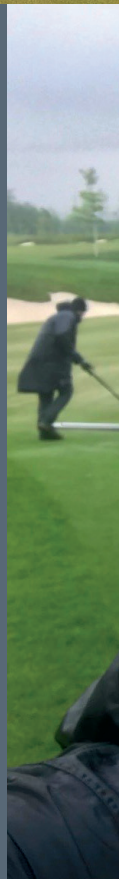
There are examples out there of people who've made the transition successfully. The skills are transferable. Greenkeepers just need to believe in themselves and be willing to step forward. **GI**



“There are plenty of opportunities to shadow colleagues and learn”

### How to start preparing for a GM role

- Put yourself in the position to show your value, even if it means taking on responsibilities not in your original remit. It will become self-growth
- Sit with your general manager, director of golf, F&B director, golf pro etc and ask them how they built their budget or marketing plan. Ask to work a shift in the kitchen!
- Exposure to different business models, from privately owned and PLCs to committee-run when considering a new course manager role
- Grow your managerial/commercial skills through LinkedIn or Coursera learning
- Consider Club Managers Association certification or business management course
- Gain an understanding of revenue management and revenue streams with associated cost of sale as this is one area an agronomist will never have been exposed to
- Tell your general manager your career aspirations and gain their support
- Ask to attend monthly business review meetings and board meetings







Pravets, Bulgaria



Jordan at Oaks Prague

## About Jordan

Growing up in Scotland, golf was naturally part of Jordan's life and, although many expected him to join his father in the motor trade, he was drawn instead to the outdoors. A formative spell at Loch Lomond, where he started as a seasonal worker and ended up staying seven years, opened his eyes to the breadth of opportunities within greenkeeping, with specialisations in construction, irrigation, mechanics, and many more besides, putting paid to the 'glorified grass-cutter' stereotype. Frustrated by limited opportunities to progress in the UK, Jordan accepted an offer from Ken Siems to move to Dubai in 2008. What began as a leap of faith has since become a career abroad that now outweighs his time in the UK. Over the years he has combined construction, grow-ins, and operational agronomy, building a broad skill set and ascending to the position of general management at Pravets in Bulgaria. He is a strong advocate for young greenkeepers to gain diverse experience, particularly in construction, to strengthen their future careers.

If you want to follow Jordan's day-to-day golf and agronomy schedule, check him out on Instagram [golf\\_agronomy](#) and on X [@golfagronomy](#)





# Obituaries

Winter 2026

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We include an Obituaries section in Greenkeeper International on a periodic basis to pay our respects to BIGGA members and those close to the association who have recently passed away

If you would like to inform us of a member's passing, please contact us by emailing [membership@bigga.co.uk](mailto:membership@bigga.co.uk)





## Ady Archer

1952-2025



**Ady was a BIGGA member for many years and a highly respected golf course manager.**

He enjoyed 32 years at the helm at Broadstone Golf Club and was formerly at Meyrick Park, both in Dorset.

He had an outstanding passion for heathland golf courses and was instrumental in major course improvements at Broadstone during his time there, as well as inspiring many young greenkeepers.

He was passionate about education and January was always etched in his diary to attend BTME week, where he relished taking workshops and conferences. He was also a stalwart supporter of south coast seminars and golf days.

Ady used all his knowledge and experience in shaping future managers in golf and also lectured at Bournemouth University.

Alexander McCombie, head groundsperson at the university, said: "Everyone who knew Ady would agree that he was not just a brilliant golf course manager but such a wonderful, warm and funny man who we had the greatest honour and privilege to know, and call a friend."





# Dennis Cockburn

1935-2025

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**Life Member Dennis Cockburn was a highly respected and much-loved figure in greenkeeping, whose enduring association with BIGGA left a lasting mark on the profession.**

Born in Keighley on 15 June 1935, Dennis did not enter greenkeeping immediately. His early working life included time as an apprentice builder, followed by work on the roads, where he led teams laying drainage pipes. A serious industrial accident later resulted in the loss of most of the fingers on his left hand. After his recovery, Dennis moved into greenkeeping, beginning a long and influential career.

He joined the profession in the 1970s at Branshaw Golf Club before moving to Keighley Golf Club, working under Head Greenkeeper Sam Bailes. Dennis progressed to deputy and, on Sam's retirement, became head greenkeeper. During his tenure, he oversaw significant developments, including installing an irrigation system completed entirely in-house.

In the 1980s, Dennis moved to Colne Golf Club, where he spent several happy years, before returning closer to home to become course manager at Silsden Golf Club. He remained there until his

retirement in the mid-1990s.

Former colleague Tito Arana described Dennis as a formative influence on his career and someone of great personal significance.

"He treated me like a son and set standards, both professional and personal, that stayed with you for life," he said. "So many greenkeepers who worked under Dennis went on to do well, and that says everything about the way he led people."

Dennis was deeply involved with the association throughout his career, first as a member of the BGGA and later BIGGA. He served for many years on the Northern/ Yorkshire Section committee, holding numerous roles, including President, a position he retained until his passing.

Away from work, Dennis was a keen sportsman, playing football into his late 40s and later serving with the Keighley FA. He also enjoyed golf, travel and watching sport.

A devoted family man, Dennis leaves three children, Julie, Jacqueline and Michael, along with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was predeceased three years ago by his wife Anne.

Friendly, funny and deeply decent, Dennis will be remembered with great affection by all who knew him.





## Peter Woodward

1957-2025

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**Peter was a popular member of the Midlands section who spent his career at Bloxwich and Walsall.**

He was a regular attendee at section golf tournaments and played in many events across the country, despite his modest golfing ability.

"His golf wasn't great but he was fun to be with, a truly good socialiser, liked and appreciated by his many friends and colleagues," said former Sutton Coldfield Head Greenkeeper Alan Kite.

Peter was also a frequent fixture at education and trade functions and will be a familiar name to many.

He is survived by daughters Gemma and Kirsty and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

## In Memoriam

### Paul Pennington

1969-2025





# 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](http://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](mailto:info@bigga.co.uk)

## Senior Greenkeeper

### Bloxwich Golf Club, West Midlands

We are seeking a dedicated and experienced **Senior Greenkeeper** join our team and play a key role in the ongoing development of our course.

**Key responsibilities:** Course maintenance, including irrigation systems; operate and maintain machinery; assist with course improvement projects, including landscaping and drainage.

**Skills & attributes:** Strong work ethic with attention to detail; able to work independently or as part of a team; willingness to learn and develop within the role.

**Experience & qualifications:** previous greenkeeping or grounds maintenance experience; NVQ Level 2 in Sports Turf Maintenance or working towards (desirable but not essential); PA1/PA2 spraying certificates or willingness to train.

**Salary:** Competitive

**To apply:** Please send a CV to Adrian Howe, General Manager [generalmanager@bloxwichgolfclub.com](mailto:generalmanager@bloxwichgolfclub.com)

## Deputy Course Manager

### Childwall Golf Club, Liverpool

Childwall Golf Club is seeking an ambitious **Deputy Course Manager**. Working alongside the Course Manager, you'll help lead the progressive and well-resourced team to support the delivery of our five year improvement plan.

The ideal candidate will be an experienced greenkeeper with supervisory or deputy experience, Level 3+ qualification in Sports Turf Management (Level 4 preferred) and strong skills in turf care, agronomy, irrigation and course setup. They will have spraying certificates and chainsaw competency (or willingness to obtain), excellent communication and organisational skills and be passionate about modern greenkeeping practices

**What we offer:** Competitive salary and pension; full John Deere fleet and modern facilities; ongoing investment in the course/ machinery; BIGGA membership and support for CPD.

**To apply, send your CV and covering letter to:** Andy Birchall - Secretary Manager [greenkeeper@childwallgolfclub.co.uk](mailto:greenkeeper@childwallgolfclub.co.uk)

## Head Greenkeeper

### Fynn Valley Golf Club, Suffolk

Fynn Valley is a 27-hole family friendly golf club with driving range and swing studio. The club also offers luxury holiday accommodation and a caravan site. We are looking to recruit a **Head Greenkeeper** to join our team.

**Job specification:** Maintain a safe workplace; manage finances and budgets; manage staff recruitment, induction and development; promote the organisation and its values; manage the golf course and greenkeeping team; manage projects and events; maintain the grounds of the clubs' other facilities, including garden areas and caravan site.

**Benefits:** 28 days holiday per annum; training opportunities; use of golf course; staff meals when on duty; free healthcare and auto enrolment into NEST Pension Scheme, after probation.

**Salary:** £35,000 - £38,000 pa, depending on experience.

**Please send your CV and covering letter to** [robert@fynn-valley.co.uk](mailto:robert@fynn-valley.co.uk)

## Qualified Greenkeeper

### Heswall Golf Club

Heswall Golf Club is a private members' club on the Wirral Peninsula. Following significant investment, the club is seeking a full-time **Qualified Greenkeeper** to join its team.

Working under the Course Manager, the successful candidate will play a key role in maintaining and improving course presentation, demonstrating a strong work ethic, attention to detail and the ability to work independently or as part of a team. Candidates should ideally hold NVQ Level 2 (or equivalent), have a minimum of three years' experience, and possess PA1, PA2 and PA6 certificates. NVQ Level 3 and chainsaw certification are desirable but not essential.

**Salary:** £31,200 plus overtime, pension contribution, staff bonus scheme, BIGGA membership, training support, and honorary golf membership.

**Please apply with a covering letter and CV to** Martin Andrew [martinandrew@heswallgolfclub.com](mailto:martinandrew@heswallgolfclub.com) by Friday 6th February

## Assistant Greenkeeper

### Hogs Haven Golf Club, Scotland

Hogs Haven Golf Club is a new world-class golf development located two miles south of St Andrews. The project is focused on Phase 1 grow-in works and Phase 2 construction, ahead of a soft opening in summer 2026 and full opening in July 2027. We are seeking **Assistant Greenkeepers** to join the Agronomy Team during this exciting period.

Successful candidates will be involved in all aspects of course construction, grow-in and long-term maintenance. Duties will include USGA green construction, drainage and irrigation installation, bunker construction, seeding and turfing. Applicants should hold NVQ Level 2 (or equivalent) in Greenkeeping or Sports Turf Management, have a solid greenkeeping background and be motivated for professional development. PA1, PA2 and PA6 certificates are desirable.

**To apply, please email** [michael.hughes@amfife.com](mailto:michael.hughes@amfife.com) with a CV along with a cover letter explaining your interest in the role.

## Irrigation Technician

### Hogs Haven Golf Club, Scotland

Hogs Haven Golf Club is a new world-class golf development located two miles south of St Andrews. The project is focused on Phase 1 grow-in works and Phase 2 construction, ahead of a soft opening in summer 2026 and full opening in July 2027. We are seeking an experienced **Irrigation Technician** to join the Senior Agronomy Team at this key stage. The successful candidate will be involved in all aspects of irrigation installation, course construction support and grow-in, and will manage the ongoing operation and maintenance of irrigation systems and associated technologies.

Applicants should have a minimum of three years' experience, NVQ Level 3 (or equivalent) in Greenkeeping or Sports Turf Management, and have experience in golf course irrigation. PA1, PA2 and PA6 certificates are desirable.

**To apply, please email** [michael.hughes@amfife.com](mailto:michael.hughes@amfife.com) with a CV along with a cover letter explaining your interest in the role.



# LOOKING FOR A NEW TEAM MEMBER?

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## Senior Greenkeeper

Hogs Haven Golf Club, Scotland

Hogs Haven Golf Club is a new world-class golf development located just two miles south of St Andrews. The project is focused on Phase 1 grow-in works and Phase 2 construction, ahead of a soft opening in summer 2026 and full opening in July 2027. We are recruiting **Senior Greenkeepers** to join the Agronomy Team during this exciting phase.

Successful candidates will be involved in all aspects of course construction, grow-in and long-term maintenance. Duties will include USGA green construction, drainage and irrigation installation, bunker construction, seeding and turfing. Applicants should hold NVQ Level 3 (or equivalent) in Greenkeeping or Sports Turf Management, have a strong background in greenkeeping and a genuine passion for the profession. PA1, PA2 and PA6 certificates are desirable.

To apply, please email [michael.hughes@amfife.com](mailto:michael.hughes@amfife.com) with a CV along with a cover letter explaining your interest in the role.

## Assistant Greenkeeper

West Kent Golf Club, Kent

Reporting to the Course Manager, we are looking for an **Assistant Greenkeeper** to assist in the preparation, maintenance and improvement of the golf course and practice areas, ensuring excellent playing conditions for members and guests.

**Key responsibilities:** Course maintenance including mowing, divoting and general turf care; operate and maintain a variety of turf machinery safely; assist with course renovation work; apply fertilisers, topdressings and wetting agents under supervision.

**Skills & attributes:** Strong work ethic with attention to detail; ability to work independently and as part of a team; flexible and reliable, with a willingness to work early mornings, weekends, and in all weathers; positive, enthusiastic attitude.

**Qualifications:** NVQ Level 2 in Sports Turf (or equivalent)

**Salary:** Competitive dependant on skill set and experience

To apply: Send an email with CV and covering letter to [course.manager@wkgc.co.uk](mailto:course.manager@wkgc.co.uk)





# Dougie Melville

**Dougie Melville's journey in greenkeeping spans three decades, having started as an apprentice at Swanston in 1996.**

After gaining experience in irrigation and course construction, he joined Edinburgh Leisure, which consists of six municipal courses, and worked his way up to deputy head at Silverknowes.

In 2016, he stepped into the role of head greenkeeper at Falkirk, where he remained until last November, when he took on a new challenge as course manager at Duddingston.

### **How do you reflect on your time at Falkirk and the work you did?**

The members will certainly see I made a difference to the putting surfaces. I'm also proud of the work I did with the team there and boosting morale. They were a great team who just wanted to get on and do the work, and I still keep in contact with them. The golf course itself was in good condition, though the greens needed work – thatch removal, better drainage and dealing with the fact that the course is on a floodplain. It was obviously a step up from Edinburgh Leisure in terms of responsibility, budget and managing full staff, so I really enjoyed my time there.

### **Why the move to Duddingston, and why now?**

I'm originally from Edinburgh, and Duddingston was always one of the top courses in the area. When the job came up, I thought, 'there's no harm in having a conversation'. I was happy at Falkirk, but I put my CV in and was fortunate enough to get the job.

### **What did the whole process involve?**

I sent in the usual CV and cover letter, then was offered an interview with the GM and vice-captain. A week later, I had a second interview with the board, where I did a 45-minute presentation on what I would do, including a three- and five-year plan for the course and machinery. There were seven board members present, which was quite intimidating. However, you need to be honest about what needs doing and what it involves – there is no point just telling people what you think they want to hear.

### **How do you go about winning the trust of a new team?**

I've sat down with all the team individually to go through development plans for the next three years. I've asked them what they want to achieve and I'm bringing them up to speed on what we're trying to do here at Duddingston. I want my team to be informed and involved. We currently



### **Dougie's tips for those pre-interview nerves**

Treat people how you want to be treated. Don't be afraid just to have a conversation – ask questions, see what progresses. There's nothing to lose – you're putting yourself in an uncomfortable position but the outcome could be great. Be confident in your knowledge, explain what needs to happen on the course and keep the bigger picture in mind. Being nervous is understandable, and it shows you care – they'll understand.



## After spending 10 enjoyable years at Falkirk, Dougie is embracing a new challenge at Duddingston



**“I want my team to be informed and involved”**

have six staff – three original and three new – and we’ll be taking on a deputy and another assistant. It’s basically a mostly new team, so it’s about getting them aligned with the vision for the course.

### **So people first, systems second?**

Exactly. When the job was offered, they told me I’d need to get my own team in. The three existing staff would stay, but the rest could be chosen by me. So we focused on building the right team first, then moving forward with everything else.

### **What does success look like for you in the first 12 months?**

Consistency in the greens is key. We’ll be hollow-coring,

verti-draining and topdressing several times before the start of the season. We’ve done soil samples, worked on seeded and turfed areas and improved paths. The goal is to improve playability and aesthetics with a clear programme in place for the next few years.

### **And in terms of your three- to five-year plans, what are the big priorities?**

A full bunker renovation – they’ve just been topped up with sand over the years with no drainage or shaping. The irrigation system will also need an upgrade as it’s 40–45 years old, with PVC valves and heads. Another big focus is to improve the welfare units and sheds. Those are the three main long-term focuses. **GI**





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# Practical Greenkeeping

Refine your skillset and expand your knowledge



**Course Manager Steve Hardy is braced for whatever the month may throw at him and his team at Kenilworth**



**What we do in...  
February**

**Club: Kenilworth,  
Warwickshire**

**The changeable conditions mean February is a month where you just have to see what you get – and make sure you have a plan for all eventualities.**

In recent years, we've seen everything from frozen, white-over conditions to 15-degree days that feel more like early spring. At Kenilworth, that means planning for several different scenarios rather than committing to one fixed programme.

If we get a hard, frozen February, the focus shifts away from turf as tree work and woodland management come to the fore, along with finishing off ditch clearance and any remaining leaf collection.

It's also a key period for machinery maintenance. Personally, I don't like pushing that any later than February – everything needs to be sharp, serviced and ready, because March is effectively the start of the season for me. Stock ordering also happens quietly in the background at this stage.

At the other extreme, we've seen it warm enough at this time of year to justify early greens maintenance. If a weather window opens, I want to be ready to take advantage of it. I've hollow

cored and verti-drained greens with heavy dressings in mid-February before, but that's only possible if all materials are already in the yard. Sand bays full, seed stocked, fresh tines on the machines – you rarely get much notice with the weather.

If it stays dry, getting aeration into the ground is always beneficial, and we'll keep the verti-draining going whenever conditions allow, even in frozen ground, as it can actually reduce surface damage.

A very wet February brings a different challenge. Course closures tend to push you back towards woodland work but in areas where machinery isn't required. That allows us to remove dangerous trees, lower limbs and stack material for habitat creation without

tracking across the course. If it's wet but mild, there's also an opportunity for early granular applications, particularly on tees, as we're aiming to be back on main tees very soon.

The key theme for this month is flexibility.

My winter planning starts back in September, looking six months ahead at what we'd like to achieve. The earlier jobs are ticked off, the better, because once spring growth arrives you want to be presenting the course, not finishing winter projects.

February is about being prepared for all outcomes and not forcing any particular work if conditions aren't right. That's what will set you up best for the year ahead. [GI](#)



**“If a weather window opens, I want to be ready to take advantage”**



# Balancing soil moisture

Changing weather patterns bring the need for new moisture management techniques to maintain turf health and playability



**Author:** Pete May, Syngenta  
Technical Manager

**Extremes of weather conditions are becoming ever more frequent - and with it, increasing the challenges for turf management to build resilience against a changing climate.**

Now, however, prolonged periods of hot and dry weather that push turf plants to the brink of survival, are interspersed with intense rainfall events and the risk of flooding or waterlogging.

Managing these two extremes, to maintain consistent conditions, is crucial for turf health and improved playability demanded by today's golfers. Furthermore, managing moisture more consistently will ensure better use of available irrigation resources and improve overall uptake and utilisation of nutrient inputs.

Moisture management that starts in early spring, before the effects of dry down stress impact on turf quality, will utilise available resources more effectively and has a far greater chance of success, rather than waiting until later in the season to start when there is limited opportunity for recovery.

The role of a wetting agent can create soil conditions to improve root development that is the foundation of plant health. The purpose-designed Qualibra turf wetting can aid water penetration

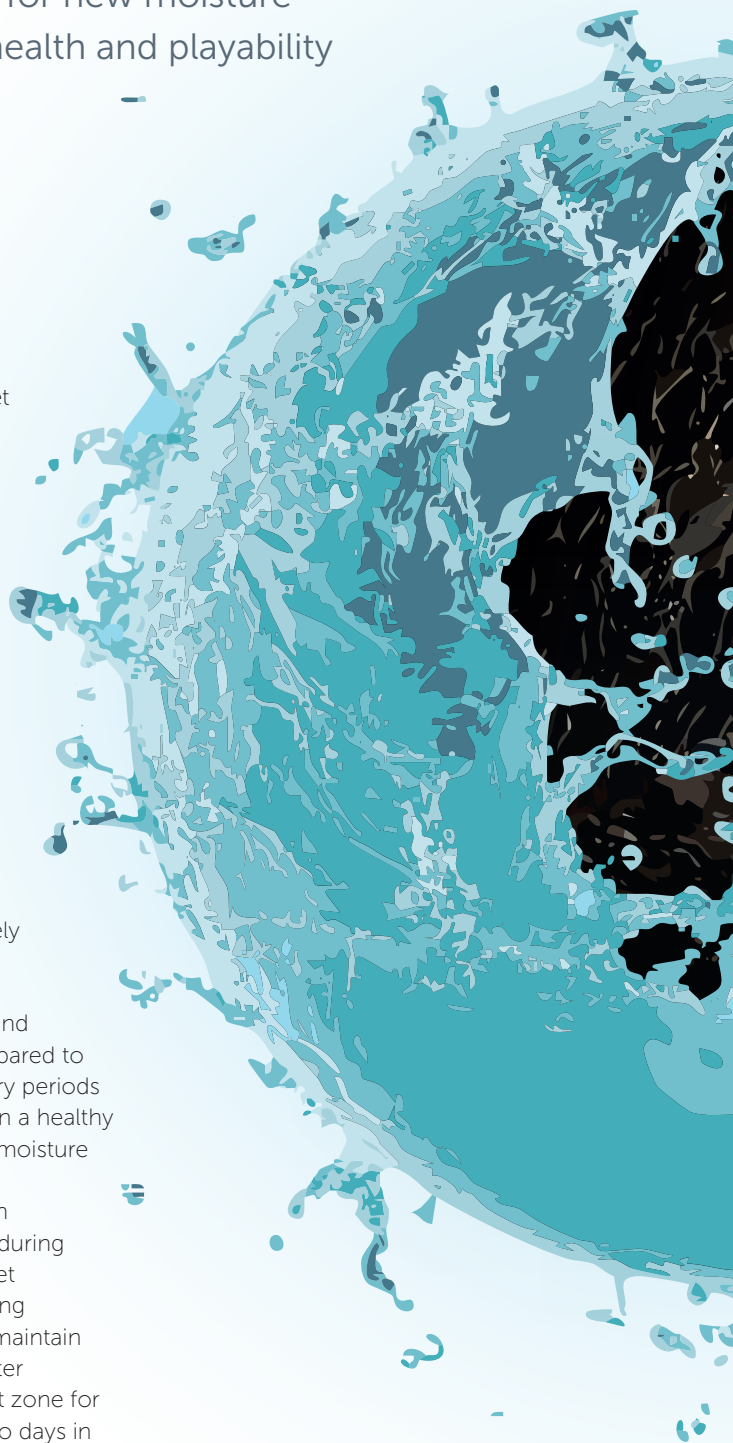
and draw moisture down through the soil profile, yet hold water capacity in the root zone.

## Research results

New research has shown that its combination of a dynamic penetrant component and a polymer retainer works to move excess rainwater down from the surface, yet retain moisture within the soil profile in the deeper rooting zone.

In practice, this effectively means that during wet periods of the season Qualibra keeps surfaces and the soil profile drier, compared to untreated, while during dry periods it retains water to maintain a healthy balance of air space and moisture through the soil profile.

Syngenta trials at Stein in Switzerland showed that during a period of excessively wet conditions, the season-long programme was able to maintain soil VWC (Volumetric Water Content) within the target zone for 21 days, compared to zero days in the untreated area. However, when the same trials area went into a



**“Managing extremes to maintain consistent conditions is crucial”**



Working in partnership with

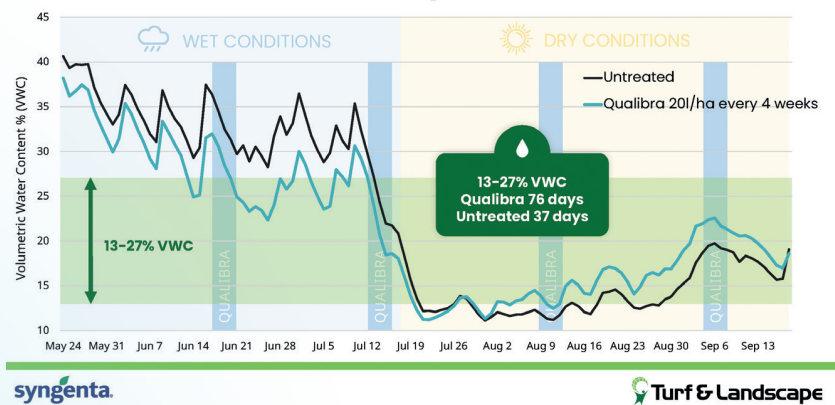
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## Qualibra holds water where you need it

Fig. 1



prolonged drought period with dry conditions, the treated area stayed within the target VMC for 45 days, compared to just 37 days in the untreated area (Fig 1).

Overall through the whole season of seasonal rainfall on unirrigated turf, Qualibra held soil moisture in the target VMC range for more than twice as many days as untreated - 76 days, compared to 35.

When assessed for turf health and vigour, using drone imagery to calculate NDVI, the treated area was consistently better throughout the drought stress period and up to 10% more efficient in its utilisation of available light for photosynthesis.

The practical implication is to start season-long Qualibra programmes early in the spring, while there is still available moisture to conserve and make better use of going into hotter and drier periods. And then to continue treatments into the autumn to maintain optimum soil conditions for turf to take advantage of extended growing conditions, without fear of retaining too much moisture.

### Hydrophobic risks

Opting to use a pure penetrant wetting agent early in the spring does risk losing soil moisture too quickly, when recent weather trends indicate February and early spring can see the onset of very dry periods. This would also increase the risk of early onset of hydrophobic conditions in soils.

Plants in affected areas die back to leave dry patch areas that are typically slow to recover, even when growing conditions improve. This leads to greater run off and nutrient leaching, with less efficient use of irrigation where available. Then, to further compound the issues, germination and growth of any overseeding to repair the patches is inhibited.

With changing weather extremes and increasing prolonged periods of hot, dry weather - as experienced in the UK last summer - the impact on turf loss was severe for many golf clubs, particularly on unirrigated fairways.

Implementing your wetting agent programme earlier in the spring helps to mitigate the effects of hydrophobic soils and helps to maintain a more consistent soil moisture balance across the whole surface. This, in turn, will mean season-long better conditions for turf health and play.

### Top tips to manage moisture

- Start wetting agent programmes earlier in the season
- Conserve available moisture before dry periods
- Use new technology to understand soil moisture
- Aim to prevent hydrophobic soils developing
- Continue Qualibra applications longer in autumn



Follow the conversation





**Joe Curtis**

 **Bodensee Weissensberg, Germany**



# The world of greenkeeping

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

**For Joe Curtis, working abroad was never a question of if, but when. After building his career in the UK, he made the move into mainland Europe and has fully embraced the professional and personal challenges that come with it.**

Now course manager at Bodensee Weissensberg, close to the borders of Austria and Switzerland, Joe is operating within a condensed playing season and a very different agronomic rhythm.

At a Robert Trent Jones-designed layout with strong foundations, a major overhaul of the course's many bunkers is high on his list of priorities.

## **How did your journey in greenkeeping lead you to working in Germany?**

I grew up living on a golf course after my parents became stewards at Ross-on-Wye. As a teenager I helped the greenkeepers during the holidays, then went to Hartpury College and moved into full-time greenkeeping at Gloucester Golf Club. Celtic Manor followed before the 2010 Ryder Cup, which gave me exposure to tournament golf and construction work, and then I moved into deputy and head greenkeeper roles closer to home. Working abroad was always part of my plan. I wanted to experience something different and offer my family a different lifestyle.

We first moved to Austria during Covid, which wasn't the

easiest time, but it turned out to be the best decision we ever made. After four years there, I was approached about my current role in Germany, which offered a new challenge, a strong club backing and a great place to live for the family.

## **What first stood out to you about the course?**

The layout immediately impressed me. It's a tight Robert Trent Jones design with narrow fairways, lots of trees and strong bunkering. The greens and tees were already in very good condition, but it was also clear there were issues, particularly with drainage and bunker sustainability. With 86 bunkers and a relatively small team, it was obvious that maintenance hours were being swallowed up repairing washouts after heavy rain.

That actually excited me, because there was real scope to improve things. Rather than chasing perfection, there was a chance to put structure and a long-term plan in place that would make the course easier to maintain while still improving presentation and playability.

## **How different is the working environment compared to the UK?**

The biggest difference is the season length. We're typically open from late March until early November, so everything has to be planned around that window. When the course is open, expectations are high and there's very little tolerance for





“Getting the team involved was key”

### What to do with 86 bunkers...

Maintaining the bunkers has been a huge challenge for the team and addressing that is a top priority. We've put together a five-year bunker renovation plan where every bunker is assessed individually. Though most are well placed strategically, they are poorly designed in terms of maintenance, with steep sand banks where only a small percentage is actually playable. Others need better drainage or reshaping to reduce washouts. The aim is to cut down the man-hours spent on maintaining them while improving how they look and play. If we can save time constantly repairing bunkers, we can redirect that effort into other areas of the course. The club understands the issue and has been supportive in terms of investment, equipment and, where needed, contractors.

disruption, which makes routine practices like aeration and topdressing far harder to schedule than in the UK.

Agronomically, we're working at around 600–700 metres above sea level, which brings colder springs, earlier autumns and much greater temperature swings. Winters can mean prolonged snow cover and frozen ground, while summers regularly exceed 30°C. That has a big impact on grass health, recovery rates and how aggressive you can be with inputs.

Winter protection and disease management are key

### Joe's tips for taking a job overseas

- Do your homework – visit the area, understand the club, climate and season length, and speak to people already working in that country.
- Protect your fallback option – if you can, keep a base at home (e.g. don't sell your house immediately) so you've got security if it doesn't work out.
- Decide for the whole family, not just your career – make sure the move works for partners and children too (lifestyle, schooling, language), not just for your own professional ambitions.

considerations. You have to prepare turf for the possibility of being under snow for months, with a real focus on plant health going into winter to minimise snow mould and stress coming out of it. Planning ahead is everything.

### How does the short season affect staffing and planning?

Once the course closes, the staff finish for the winter and don't return until February. December and January are too cold to do much anyway, with frozen ground limiting access. In reality, I'm managing the course with staff available for about 10 months of the year, so efficiency and forward planning are critical. It also means that when the season is on, it's very intense, because there's no room to catch up later.

### You arrived after several changes in leadership. How did you approach working with the existing team?

Getting the team involved was key. I spent time talking to them about what works on the course and what doesn't, and explaining why we're doing things, not just telling them what needs doing. I'm not interested in dictating for the sake of it – I'd rather a job take longer and be done properly.

We've also looked at development opportunities, whether that's training or simply giving people more responsibility. Creating structure and a clear plan has helped give everyone confidence that we're moving in the right direction. **GI**





# Hunley's



# wetlands





**“We wanted to create wetlands of genuine ecological value”**



## Course Manager Greg Fitzmaurice explains how Hunley's wetland network is delivering for wildlife and playability

**Wetlands have become an increasingly important tool for golf courses seeking to balance environmental responsibility with practical course management, and at Hunley, they now form a central part of a carefully planned long-term strategy.**

Working in partnership with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and supported by Natural England funding, the club has developed a network of wetlands designed primarily to support great crested newts, a legally protected species whose numbers have declined due to habitat loss. The results have been impressive, with every wetland becoming inhabited within a year of construction.

Crucially, the benefits have extended beyond biodiversity alone. By diverting surface water into purpose-built wetland areas, turf conditions and playability have improved, while turning previously low-value or problematic ground into visually appealing features with genuine ecological function.

Soil excavated during construction has been reused across the course to create and enhance tees, greens and pathways, demonstrating how conservation projects can be fully integrated into wider course development plans.

Most recently, a new wetland adjacent to the Penningtons fairway has strengthened connectivity between five separate sites, allowing wildlife to move more freely across the landscape and increasing the resilience of local populations.

Course Manager Greg Fitzmaurice explains how the project began, how it has been delivered alongside a busy golf course and why collaboration has been key to its success.

### **When did you start looking at introducing new wetland areas?**

We have a partnership with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, which began in 2016 when we first approached them after successfully attracting barn owls to

one of our nest boxes. The Trust's specialist team then worked closely with us to install additional boxes and encourage a wider range of bird species. Over time, the relationship developed further, with the Trust carrying out surveys and supporting broader wildlife enhancement across the site. They later brought forward the idea of creating wetlands, recognising that great crested newts were already present and that Natural England funding was available to support the Trust in identifying and delivering suitable wetland sites across the region.

The first wetland project at Hunley emerged in 2021 during one of our regular site meetings. Through an established working relationship, we routinely discussed potential initiatives together, and this was a new scheme they were developing at the time. I was immediately interested and identified a potential site where a wetland could be created.

### **What were the main challenges in delivering the project?**

Most of the wetland sites were located away from active playing areas, so managing construction alongside a live golf course was relatively straightforward. With the nature of our clay soil, timing is particularly important to prevent the soil from being too wet and unworkable, so construction always takes place in October.

Work is also carefully communicated in advance and throughout the construction process, ensuring that golfers can continue to play with minimal disruption. Each wetland takes roughly a week to complete from start to finish, allowing the project to proceed efficiently and safely.

### **How did you go about selecting the locations for each wetland area?**

Our first consideration was finding areas that we could be confident would hold water, so we focused on





low-lying parts of the course that generally remain wet during the winter months. We wanted to create wetlands of genuine ecological value, so we specifically selected sites that were lacking in biodiversity and where the new habitat would make the most difference.

#### **What measurable benefits have you seen so far in terms of biodiversity?**

All of the wetlands tested positive for great crested newts in the first year, which was, of course, the main driver for the projects. Beyond that, a wide range of species have colonised the new habitats, including plants, amphibians and dragonflies. The wetlands have also transformed previously bland areas into attractive, engaging features on the course.

#### **What impact have the wetlands had on course performance?**

Interestingly, we've noticed that adjacent areas have become drier as water naturally collects in the wetlands, which has the added benefit of improving playing conditions.

As a greenkeeper, I was brought up on the idea that we needed to get water off the course, but the reality is

that the goal is simply to maintain dry, playable surfaces. Water isn't an issue as long as it's collected in areas away from play.

#### **Have there been any other benefits from undertaking this work?**

In one particularly wet spot, we created a wetland and used the excavated soil to build a raised path, which now provides a dry route for golfers to pass, but we haven't actually removed any water.

We've reused excavated soil to extend a green and to build or extend several tees. These projects wouldn't have been possible without the soil from the wetland works and doing so has allowed us to enhance the course while making efficient use of available materials.

#### **Why is it important to have connectivity between wetland sites?**

Connectivity is crucial because it allows species to move freely between breeding ponds and terrestrial habitats. This movement reduces the risk of local extinction, as connected populations can support each other if one site fails. It also helps maintain genetic diversity, preventing

#### **A legally protected species**

Great crested newts were a central focus of the project, helping to shape both the design of the wetlands and the partnerships involved.

Greg explained that protecting the species was identified as a priority from the outset.

"Great crested newts are a legally protected species that have experienced significant declines as a result of habitat loss, and they are also an important indicator of healthy pond and wetland ecosystems," he said.

"Natural England became involved because, as the government's adviser on the natural environment, it has a statutory duty to protect and enhance biodiversity and therefore supports conservation projects that help restore habitats and strengthen populations of protected species."





“Each wetland takes roughly a week to complete from start to finish”

## Constructing a wetland

Each wetland was built to a clear framework, with guidance provided by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust but plenty of scope for on-site decision-making.

“The Trust provided us with a blueprint to follow, detailing specifications for pond depth, gradients, location and guidance on future management,” Greg explained.

“Once we agreed on the site, we had a fair amount of flexibility in shaping the wetland, so we designed the physical contours ourselves.

“The first wetland was created using a single excavator. The soil that was removed was carefully spread around the edges and shaped to create a natural-looking feature.

“To enhance the aesthetics after construction, we finished the surrounding area with indigenous turf cut on site, helping the wetland blend in more rapidly.”



inbreeding and strengthening the overall resilience of species populations.

## What are the next steps?

Given the size of the site, there is certainly potential to expand the wetland network. Any future developments would depend on a range of factors, and we plan to continue consulting with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust on an annual basis to identify the best opportunities for enhancement.

## What advice would you give to other clubs considering a project like this?

Every golf course is different, so wetland projects might not be suitable for all. My advice would be to consult widely with experts, local groups and outside organisations – you can't have too much input. We've learned an incredible amount about managing our site, not just from professional advice but also from those who actively help us care for the land. Over time, we've built strong relationships with local groups, volunteers and neighbouring landowners, all of whom contribute to the success of our conservation efforts. **GI**



# 'Sustainability is essential to the future of golf'

James Hutchinson spent some time at North Hants and came away mightily impressed by their progressive approach to course management



Andy Reason



Sam Evans

Working freelance is never easy but once in a while I stumble across a greenkeeper who makes my job that little bit easier. As a trip to North Hants revealed, I found a real belter in Andy Reason.

I could write at length about how important Andy is to both his place of work and to the wider world of golf, but who better to tell the story than the man himself, along with North Hants Course Manager Sam Evans.

I had the pleasure of speaking to Andy and Sam about the stunning course and the commendable efforts of the team there in managing a rich and valuable heathland venue.

**Can you tell me a bit about the course and its history?**

**SE:** The club was founded in 1904 and has a rich history blending tradition with innovation. It was designed by James Braid

and later shaped by architects like Harry Colt, Tom Simpson, Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie, so the course reflects over a century of golfing evolution.

Once a 'country club' with tennis, croquet and dining, the club has adapted with the times, modernising its facilities while keeping its heritage alive. Over the years, it has hosted notable events and produced talented golfers, including Justin Rose.

Recent refurbishments, including a £1.5 million course upgrade and state-of-the-art irrigation, have enhanced both playability and sustainability, showing how North Hants balances top-quality golf with environmental stewardship.

**Futureproofing of the highest order going on then, but what about any rarities such as orchids, other wildflowers or maybe a rare bird has been spotted?**

**AR:** We've recorded a really encouraging





range of birdlife on the course, but a few species stand out as particularly significant from a conservation point of view. The highlight has been the woodlark.

It's a Schedule 1 and Red List species and a true heathland specialist. We've also logged several other Red List birds, including lesser redpoll, song thrush, mistle thrush and starling. These species are all in national decline, so their presence shows that the habitat is functioning well for wildlife. Among the Amber List species, green sandpiper, stock dove and red kite were also notable.

On the botanical side, we've been working hard to increase plant diversity across the course. This year, we introduced 45 different species of native wildflower, including yellow rattle, which is especially valuable

because it suppresses dominant grasses and allows more delicate heathland species to establish.

It's already helping us create a more open, species-rich sward that supports insects, pollinators and, ultimately, the birds that rely on them. Overall, these records underline just how valuable heathland golf courses can be for biodiversity when they're managed with sensitivity and long-term ecological goals in mind.

**You've obviously had other professionals in to assist you, has this made a difference? If so, how?**

**SE:** We've been fortunate to draw on the knowledge and passion of both seasoned professionals and dedicated hobbyists, and that combination has allowed us to achieve far more than if we'd tried to do everything

ourselves. Their involvement has not only elevated what we're able to accomplish on the ground, but it has also helped us build meaningful connections within the local community.

By bringing together such a diverse range of talent, we've been able to channel that collective energy into projects that are genuinely enhancing the golf course and its natural surroundings.

**Have the members accepted your eco projects?**

**SE:** The acceptance from our membership has been outstanding. They fully recognise that sustainability is essential to the future of golf, and their support empowers us to push even further with our green initiatives.

What's most inspiring is that our





## 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.

members view these efforts as part of a shared responsibility — a collective commitment to preserving the natural beauty of the course and ensuring that future generations can enjoy the game.

### Andy, tell me about your breakfast gatherings.

**AR:** We organised our first Breakfast Networking Meeting in September 2025. The idea was just a way of saying thank you to everyone who has been involved in our projects. We wanted to create an informal setting where people could build connections, support one another beyond the golf club and — just as importantly — give us the chance to put names to faces.

The event exceeded our expectations, and we're eager to

continue these gatherings in the months ahead. This event has helped connect many of our partners to do their own collective projects.

### Are there any further sustainability projects planned for the future?

**AR:** At a heathland golf course, sustainability starts with protecting the landscape that makes it special. Our focus is on restoring classic heathland features, expanding heather and acid grassland, managing gorse, broom and woodland carefully and controlling invasive, non-indigenous species. We're also creating wildlife corridors and small sandy scrapes to support the specialist birds, insects and reptiles that depend on open heath.

Water use is another priority. We're exploring the feasibility of a second

reservoir and looking at ways to harvest rainwater from the clubhouse and maintenance buildings, even from the M3, to reduce reliance on mains supply.

Smart irrigation, driven by soil-moisture data, ensures we use water only where it matters — mainly greens, tees and approaches — while allowing fairways to take on their natural, drier heathland character in summer.

We're also working to reduce our carbon footprint by transitioning to electric machinery and assessing opportunities for solar generation. On the turf side, we follow a low-input philosophy, keeping fertilisers and chemicals to a minimum and relying on integrated pest management.

Expanding our on-site composting also helps close the loop on organic waste.





### 'The last strongholds for urban wildlife'

Having seen the course and how the team there work at first hand, I can safely say that the heathland management is in safe hands. I've tried on numerous occasions to bring key stakeholders together around sustainability issues — not always successfully — so I wish Andy all the best with his breakfast networking initiative. Pulling everyone in the same direction is the hard part, as is balancing nature, playability and sustainability.

Everything Andy outlines for the future is vitally important, and I genuinely admire his efforts. Having visited around 480 courses myself, and occasionally encountering negativity, it is hugely pleasing to see the club fully backing these initiatives. I was particularly struck by the statement: "At North Hants, we're surrounded by urban development, so creating and protecting space for wildlife is both beneficial and essential."

Having observed golf courses for many years, I can confidently, honestly say that courses like North Hants are fast becoming one of the last strongholds for urban wildlife. Let that sink in.



Sustainability for us goes beyond the course. It's about responsible procurement, better waste handling and engaging with local conservation groups and the community.

The overall goal is a course that's environmentally resilient and true to its heathland heritage, while setting a strong example of modern sustainable greenkeeping.

**“At a heathland golf course, sustainability starts with protecting the landscape that makes it special”**

#### Is there a role for golf course ecology in the future?

**SE/AR:** Absolutely. Golf course ecology has a significant role to play in the future. Historically, courses haven't always been viewed as environmentally friendly, which makes it even more important for clubs to take responsibility and show how they can become a genuine force for good. Green spaces are essential, and when managed thoughtfully, golf courses can provide thriving habitats that support a wide range of flora and fauna.

At North Hants, we're surrounded by urban development, so creating and protecting space for wildlife is both beneficial and essential. Many of our ecological initiatives have been simple and low-cost, but by communicating regularly and involving our members, we've been able to build real momentum and expand our conservation work year after year.

What matters most now is helping the wider community understand just how much is possible when we rethink the relationship between golf and the environment. High-quality playing surfaces, strategic course design and long-term ecological stewardship are not competing priorities — they're complementary elements of a truly modern golf facility. As the game evolves, these two aims not only can coexist, they must.

Golf course ecology offers far more than aesthetic value, it provides real opportunities to protect biodiversity, restore habitats and demonstrate responsible land management on a meaningful scale.

It's no longer just a component of the sport's future — it has the potential to play a defining role in shaping a more resilient and sustainable one, both for golfers and for the natural landscapes they enjoy. **GI**







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# Let's talk about sustainability

How greenkeepers can communicate their sustainability efforts – and why it matters.





### The GEO Sustainable Golf Foundation

An international non-profit organisation working to safeguard and strengthen the future of golf, the GEO Sustainable Golf Foundation is active in more than 75 countries. It provides sustainability frameworks, tools, certification and guidance to help golf facilities improve environmental performance, social value and climate resilience.

Sustainability is now a core part of modern golf course management. From water use and chemical inputs to habitat creation and energy efficiency, greenkeepers are being asked to deliver more under increasing environmental, financial and social pressure.

Yet while the industry is making meaningful progress, the work being done can be poorly understood by golfers, members and the wider community.

Dr Robbie Fitzpatrick of the GEO Sustainable Golf Foundation addressed this challenge during a seminar at BTME 2025, focusing on how greenkeepers can better communicate the sustainability work already happening on their courses.

He underlined the importance of explaining the everyday decisions that inform course maintenance in order to build understanding and garner support.

Public expectations around sustainability have shifted significantly in recent years, and golf is not insulated from that change. Dr Fitzpatrick explained that sustainability has now become a mainstream concern.

"We are all seeing a movement now where we've moved from niche consumers demanding sustainable practices towards a world where it's actually taken up more purchasing and voting power across the world," he said.

That shift is directly relevant to golf, because golfers are experiencing the same climate pressures as everyone else.

"Golfers are human beings," said Dr Fitzpatrick. "They have families and livelihoods that are being impacted by climate change. We're seeing more flooding, more storm damage, and more drought in the summer. Some golf courses are struggling financially because of the cost of resources, and that directly affects playing conditions."

As those pressures increase, sustainability decisions made by greenkeepers are becoming more visible to golfers. Without clear explanation, those decisions can be misinterpreted. Dr Fitzpatrick stressed that communication plays a vital role in managing expectations.

"If you can explain that the golf course is a bit more brown because there are water restrictions, or that an area looks messier not because you're lazy but because you're managing it for habitat, it really helps people understand what you're trying to achieve," he said.

### Simplifying sustainability

One of the biggest barriers to effective communication is the complexity of sustainability language. Terms such as carbon neutral, biodiversity net gain and integrated management programmes can quickly alienate non-specialists.

"When you look up sustainability, it's a very complex concept," Dr Fitzpatrick explained. "There are so many different terms associated with it that it can be confusing to know what you're actually meant to be talking about."

To address this, GEO frames sustainability around four clear principles that are directly relevant to golf course management: fostering nature, conserving resources, strengthening communities and taking climate action.





## About Dr Robbie Fitzpatrick

*Lead - Impacts and Innovation, GEO Foundation*

Dr Robbie Fitzpatrick holds a PhD in Sustainable Golf from the University of St Andrews, bringing deep and up-to-date knowledge on the integration of sustainability practices within the golf industry. His role focuses on driving positive impacts and innovative solutions that are integrated across the Foundation's systems and programmes, combining a long-term vision with short-term steps that can be shared broadly.

"Those four principles help cut through the confusion," he said. "They give you a simple structure for what sustainability actually means on a golf course."

For greenkeepers, this provides a practical way to organise both actions and messages, without getting lost in technical detail.

### Start with what you already do

Dr Fitzpatrick believes greenkeepers often underestimate the value of what they already do. Sustainability does not have to mean large-scale projects or major capital investment.

"There's nothing too small to talk about when it comes to sustainability, because everything adds up," he said.

Habitat work might include bird boxes, wildflower areas or woodland management. Resource conservation could involve switching to LED lighting, reducing irrigated turf, or adjusting mowing frequencies. Integrated turf management, buffer zones and no-spray areas all have environmental value that can be communicated.

"It might feel like standard greenkeeping practice, but it's all worth sharing," he insisted. "It builds a positive picture of what the golf course is doing for people and the environment."

The key is to make that work visible and understandable to all.

### Actions before words

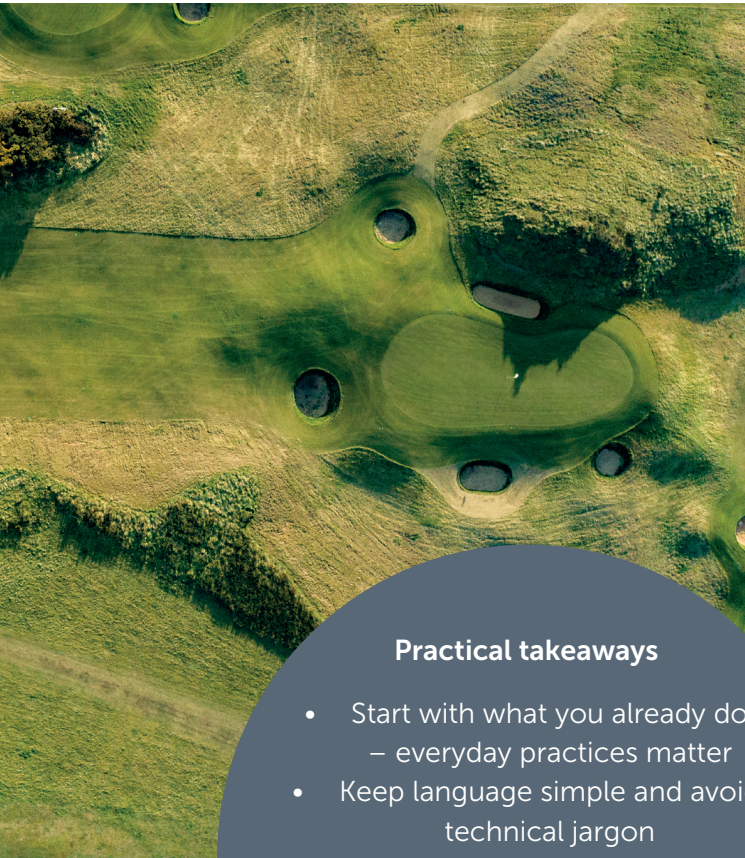
Dr Fitzpatrick emphasised that credibility is essential and communication must always be grounded in genuine action.

"Actions speak louder than words, and there's no point in talking about things you don't actually do," he said.

He encouraged greenkeepers to review their operations and identify practical examples they can confidently stand behind. Where possible, even simple data can strengthen

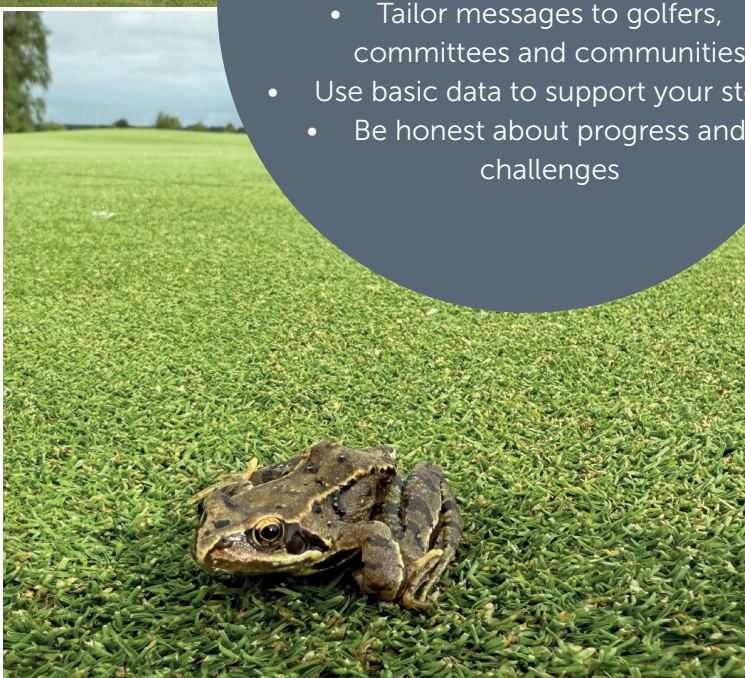






### Practical takeaways

- Start with what you already do – everyday practices matter
- Keep language simple and avoid technical jargon
  - Tailor messages to golfers, committees and communities
- Use basic data to support your story
- Be honest about progress and challenges



the message.

"If you can show that you've reduced mowing, reduced fertiliser use, or changed how water is managed, and show what benefit that's had, people respond much more positively," he explained.

Clear figures help turn sustainability from an abstract idea into something tangible and believable.

### Know your audience

Not every sustainability message is relevant to every audience. Dr Fitzpatrick urged greenkeepers to think carefully about who they are communicating with.

"If you're talking to golfers, emphasise how it benefits how the course looks or plays," he said. "If you're communicating with managers or committees, it's often better to highlight cost-savings or operational efficiencies."

Choosing the right channel is just as important. He explained: "Some members will read newsletters but never go on social media. Others are the opposite. You need to think about where people actually get their information."

Noticeboards, websites, newsletters and face-to-face conversations all have a role to play.

### Honesty builds trust

Dr Fitzpatrick also stressed the importance of being open about challenges. Sustainability is an ongoing process, and pretending otherwise risks undermining trust.

"It's important not to lie about what you're doing and to be open about where you can still make progress," he said. "Acknowledging areas for improvement builds credibility."

Inviting feedback can further strengthen relationships.

"When people feel involved in the future of the golf course, they're much more supportive of change," he explained.

### Avoid silence – and greenwashing

Doing nothing, Dr Fitzpatrick warned, allows outdated perceptions of golf to persist.

"If you don't say anything at all, people will just assume the worst and continue to hold those preconceptions of golf and the environment," he said.

At the same time, exaggerating achievements can be equally damaging.

"We don't want to greenwash or overpromise," he explained. "The aim is to hit a sweet spot where you're open, honest and transparent about what you're doing and where you can do better."

### An opportunity

Clear sustainability communication offers more than goodwill. Dr Fitzpatrick explained that it can support funding applications, improve relationships with regulators and attract positive media attention.

"When you can clearly show what your golf course offers, you can have much more constructive conversations with local authorities and other stakeholders," he said.

Most importantly, it helps reposition greenkeeping itself. Dr Fitzpatrick explained: "You're not just changing holes and raking bunkers – you're land managers, stewarding large areas that deliver real environmental and social value."

For greenkeepers, telling that story clearly and honestly is an essential part of the job. **GI**





# The science of surfactants

Enhancing nutrient efficiency in turfgrass:  
By Michael Fance & Neil Mitchell, The Aquatrols Company

**Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE) describes how effectively a plant takes up nutrients from the soil and converts them into growth and functional biomass.**

In sports turf management, achieving high NUE is increasingly important for both economic and environmental reasons. Inefficient nitrogen use raises fertiliser costs and contributes to nitrogen losses through leaching, runoff and greenhouse gas emissions.

As environmental stewardship and regulatory pressures increase, improving NUE has become a central focus for turf managers striving to balance performance with sustainability.

## Understanding Nitrogen Use Efficiency

Nitrogen Use Efficiency is commonly divided into two interconnected components. Nitrogen uptake efficiency (NUptE) refers to the ability of turfgrass roots to acquire nitrogen from the soil relative to what is available. Nitrogen utilisation efficiency (NUtE) describes how effectively the absorbed nitrogen is converted into useful biomass, such as a dense, resilient sward capable of tolerating traffic and environmental stress. Both components are essential. High uptake without effective utilisation can still result in waste, while strong utilisation is constrained if root uptake is limited by poor soil conditions.

## The influence of soil water and wettability\

Water distribution within the rootzone plays a fundamental role in determining nutrient efficiency. In soils that exhibit water repellency, moisture does not move evenly through the profile. Instead, it travels through preferential flow paths known as fingered flow. Research has shown that these pathways can become persistent unless soil wettability is corrected. The result is uneven moisture distribution,

inefficient nutrient delivery, and increased leaching of mobile nutrients such as nitrate. Where soil moisture levels vary within the rootzone, nutrient uptake will also be inconsistent, directly undermining playing surface quality and uniformity as well as impacting NUE.

## Integrated approaches to improving NUE

Optimising nutrient efficiency requires an integrated management strategy. Applying fertilisers according to the principles of 4R Nutrient Stewardship—using the right source, at the right rate, at the right time and in the right place—remains a foundation of effective nutrient management. However equally important is uniform moisture distribution. The aim is to ensure that turfgrass roots have consistent access to dissolved mineral nutrients, enabling plant uptake through osmosis and other physiological transport mechanisms.

## Foliar nutrition

Foliar application involves applying nutrients directly to leaf surfaces, where absorption occurs through the cuticle and stomatal openings. This approach allows for rapid nutrient uptake and can be particularly valuable when root uptake is limited by drought, damaged rooting, compaction, or poor soil structure. However, turfgrasses still acquire most macronutrients—especially nitrogen—from the soil. Sprayer-applied foliar or root drench programmes allow turf managers to have control, delivering precise nutrient doses aligned with performance requirements, demands of the plant and growth patterns.

## Challenges with spray-applied nutrition

Despite its advantages, spray-applied nutrition can present several challenges. These include application timing and



technique, the risk of foliar scorch, runoff from leaf surfaces, evaporation losses, spray drift, and leaching when products are applied as root drenches. If these factors are not properly managed, the efficiency gains associated with liquid nutrition can be significantly reduced.

### The role of surfactants and adjuvants

Soil surfactants influence rootzone performance by modifying the interaction between soil and water. Nutrients do not simply move from soil into plants; uptake is a complex process governed by physics, chemistry, and biology. The use of carefully selected surfactants as co-formulant adjuvants can address many limitations associated with nutrient applications. Spreaders and wetting agents reduce surface tension, improving spray coverage, adhesion, and absorption while reducing runoff. Anti-drift products improve on-target delivery, while penetrants and absorption enhancers increase cuticle permeability and assist nutrient movement into plant tissues or through fibrous organic layers into the soil. Hydrophilic nutrient retention technologies further reduce losses and improve nutrient availability within the upper profile.

### Managing nitrogen in modern turf systems

The sports turf sector faces growing pressure to reduce nitrogen inputs while maintaining high-quality playing surfaces. Environmental considerations, grass species selection, and compliance with current and future legislation all contribute to this challenge. Nitrogen remains the most important mineral nutrient for turfgrasses, influencing colour, density, stress tolerance, recovery potential, and disease susceptibility. Efficient utilisation of both applied and soil-derived nitrogen is therefore essential, particularly during periods of environmental or mechanical stress.

### Improving nitrogen efficiency through moisture management

Improving nitrogen use efficiency is not solely about fertiliser choice or application rate; it is intrinsically linked to moisture management. Without uniform water distribution, even the most carefully designed nutrition programme will fail to deliver optimal results. Correcting soil water repellency and preventing fingered flow allows a uniform wetting front to develop, ensuring consistent moisture levels at the surface and throughout the rootzone. This directly increases plant-available nitrogen, improves root uptake, and reduces nutrient losses through leaching.

AquaVita co-formulant surfactant technology, used in the new Aquatrols VerdeLNX liquid nutrition range, has proven to enhance nutrient efficiency while delivering additional agronomic benefits. Independent research completed at Virginia Tech State University showed AquaVita Technology is providing better outcomes in terms of the grass plants ability to cope with and then recover from stress. This included measurable increases in root biomass, length, surface area, and volume. A healthier, more extensive root system reinforces nitrogen uptake and utilisation efficiency, supporting resilient, high-performance sports turf surfaces.

### In conclusion

As the turf industry continues to respond to increasing environmental, regulatory, and performance pressures, a



deeper understanding of the interactions between water, soil, and nutrients is essential. Effective moisture management underpins nutrient availability and uptake, and the strategic use of the right soil surfactants within management programmes can play a decisive role in improving uniformity and efficiency. When this approach is combined with nutritional products that incorporate advanced surfactant technologies, turf managers are better equipped to optimise nitrogen use efficiency, reduce nutrient losses, and maintain high-quality playing surfaces. This integrated approach enables the delivery of resilient, high-performance turf systems that meet the demands of the modern sporting environment while aligning with sustainability expectations.

### The Aquatrols mission

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# Preparing for the 2026 golf season

Premier all-weather surfaces with Huxley Golf

## Huxley® Golf

Premier All-Weather Surfaces for Golf

As April 2026 draws closer and the new golf season comes into view, clubs nationwide are entering a crucial period of preparation. From fine-tuning course conditions to upgrading facilities, the countdown to the season starting is well underway. Members and visitors expect excellence from the first practise shot—and delivering that standard requires reliable, high-performance solutions.

With more than 20 years of experience supporting golf clubs around the world, Huxley Golf has become a benchmark for quality, innovation and durability. Our all-weather golf surfaces and practice solutions are designed to help clubs start the season strong, reduce maintenance pressures, and provide consistently outstanding playing conditions.

From teeing surfaces and golf mats to practice nets and pathway turf, we supply and install everything needed to enhance both playability and presentation.

### High-performance tee turf built for heavy use

The teeing ground is one of the most demanding areas on any golf course, particularly on par threes and busy layouts. Constant footfall and repetitive play can quickly take their toll on natural grass, leading to worn, uneven surfaces and increased maintenance demands.

Huxley Golf's tee turf offers a dependable alternative.

Purpose-built for high-traffic areas, it delivers a level, consistent strike surface throughout the season—regardless of weather or usage. A golf tee can be inserted anywhere across the surface, allowing wear to be evenly distributed and ensuring consistent playability for every golfer.

Designed to closely mirror the look and performance of natural grass, while significantly reducing wear, downtime and labour-intensive upkeep. Whether used year-round, seasonally or within practice zones, Huxley tee turf helps clubs maintain presentation and performance when it matters most.

*As used by Royal Troon Golf Club*

### Professional-grade golf mats and cage nets

Practice facilities are central to the modern golf club experience, and today's golfers expect surfaces that are both realistic and resilient. Huxley Golf's range of professional-grade golf mats is designed to meet these expectations, delivering outstanding durability, comfort and true-to-life performance.

New for 2026, the Hux Mat 350 Black sets a new benchmark in practice mat design. Engineered for high-volume use, it offers exceptional stability and longevity while providing realistic ball interaction and strike feedback. Its refined black finish not only delivers a clean, premium aesthetic but also provides essential contrast for simulator and launch monitor cameras, helping them accurately track ball data and readings. This makes it an ideal choice for covered driving ranges, academies, teaching bays and simulator environments.

Like all Huxley Golf mats, the Hux Mat 350 Black is





designed to reduce impact on joints, helping players practice for longer in comfort while maintaining consistent performance throughout the season.

To complete the setup, our commercial-grade caged nets provide a secure and professional practice solution. Built to withstand intensive use and adverse weather conditions, these robust, weather-resistant nets ensure safety without compromising visibility or performance. When combined with our mats, they create a focused, high-quality practice environment that meets the demands of modern golfers and busy facilities alike.

*As used by St Enodoc*

#### Pathway turf that enhances safety and appearance

Course pathways are often underestimated, yet they play a key role in both course presentation and player safety. Washed-out, muddy, or uneven pathways not only detract from the visual appeal of a course but can also create serious health and safety risks, particularly during wet weather and high-traffic periods.

Huxley Golf's pathway turf provides a robust, visually appealing solution to these challenges. Designed to cope with heavy footfall, buggies and challenging weather conditions, it creates clean, stable, non-slip routes throughout the course, helping to minimise erosion and reduce the risk of slips and trips.

Minimal maintenance and long-lasting, pathway turf reduces ongoing repair work while enhancing the overall flow and finish of your facilities—from tees and greens to practice areas and buggy routes.

#### The Huxley Golf advantage

Preparing for the April 2026 season brings its own challenges—tight schedules, unpredictable weather, and rising expectations. Huxley Golf goes beyond supplying products; we partner with clubs to deliver tailored solutions that work.

- **Exceptional build quality** – Designed for performance, realism and longevity.
- **Proven worldwide** – Trusted by leading clubs, academies and facilities globally.
- **Specialist guidance** – Expert advice from consultation through to installation.

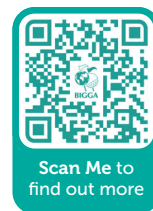
#### Invest in a strong start to the 2026 season

As the new season approaches, now is the ideal time to upgrade key areas of your facility. Huxley Golf's tee turf, practice mats, nets, and pathway solutions help elevate the playing experience while reducing maintenance pressures.

Imagine golfers stepping onto flawless teeing areas, practising on realistic surfaces, and moving around your course on clean, professional pathways. These are the details that make an impression and keep members coming back year after year.

Huxley Golf offers complete support from initial discussion to final installation, ensuring your club is fully prepared for the season. Get in touch today to arrange a site visit or consultation and discover how we can help make the upcoming season your most successful yet.

Scan the QR code to find out more





# As BIGGA President, I'm here to serve you

I'm looking forward to meeting members, promoting BIGGA and championing greenkeeping throughout my year as President



**John Wells,**  
President



As I begin my year as BIGGA President, the overwhelming feeling is one of pride and gratitude. To be nominated for this role is something I never expected, and I consider it a huge honour.

BIGGA has played a central role in my professional life and to now have the opportunity to give something back to the association that has supported me for so long is deeply meaningful.

Since the announcement, I have been genuinely touched by the number of messages and congratulations I have received from across the industry and beyond.

One that particularly caught my attention was from Sir Nick Faldo, who I first met when I started out at Welwyn Garden City and our paths have crossed many times since.

I want to get out there and meet members face to face, support our membership services managers and spend time listening to greenkeepers at all stages of their careers.

**“I am really excited about what the year has in store”**

Looking ahead, I am really excited about what the year has in store.

I have always enjoyed travelling and meeting people, and I intend to be present at as many BIGGA events as possible, whether that be education seminars, golf days or regional initiatives.

A key aim for me is to support BIGGA's continued growth, particularly by encouraging new members to join and ensuring that those who may have drifted away understand the value the association offers.

BIGGA has been hugely important throughout

my own career, from education and qualifications through to the opportunities that followed, and I firmly believe that engagement and learning are vital at every stage of a greenkeeper's journey.

It is also essential that BIGGA continues to work closely with other key bodies within the game, including The R&A, the home nations and fellow industry organisations.

Greenkeeping has not always received the recognition it deserves, and strong partnerships are crucial in raising the profile and standing of our profession.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the strength and professionalism of the BIGGA board and staff. They give a tremendous amount of time and energy in serving the best interests of members, and it is clear that the association is in very safe hands.

Greenkeeping is a demanding profession, but it is also one that inspires real passion. I have seen it throughout my career, and I share it completely.

During my year as President, I will do everything I can to honour that passion and to support the people who give so much to this industry every day. **GI**



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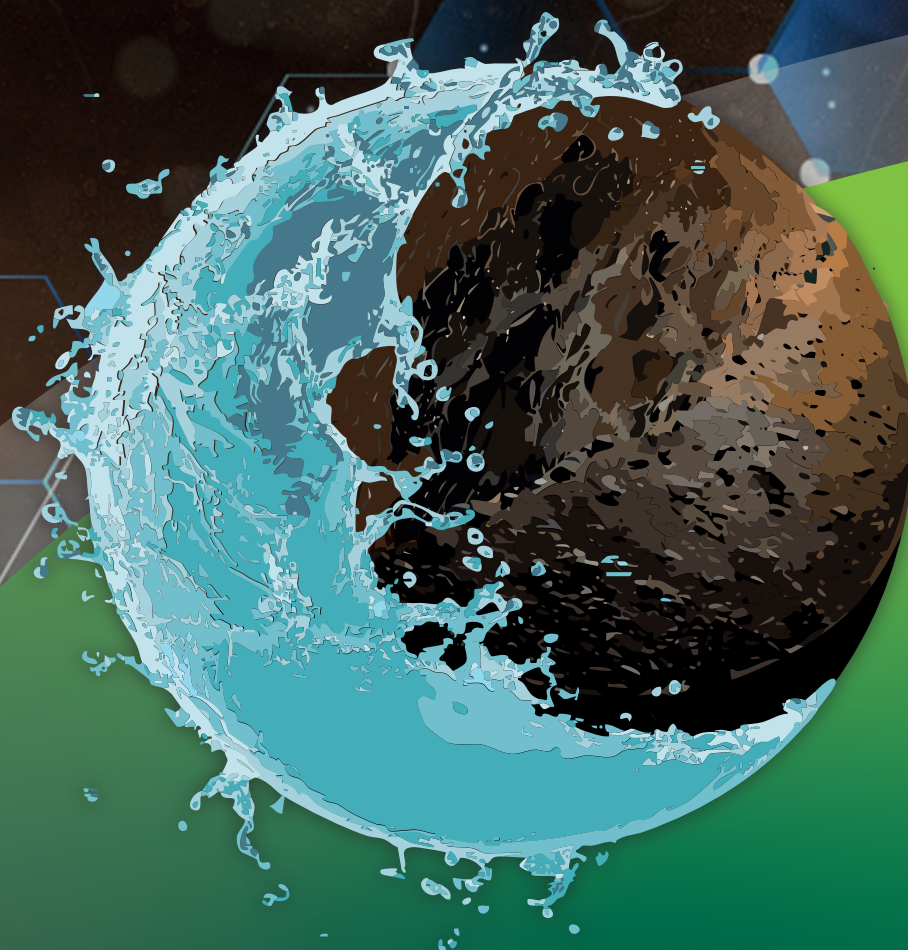




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