

Agronomy Briefing Notes - General

Sustainable Championship Agronomy

Our purpose is to deliver world class conditioned golf courses using sustainable agronomy practices where artificial inputs of fertiliser, water and pesticides are minimised. This involves careful management of the soil profile to optimise drainage, soil health and deep root development and the sward to provide turf dominated by fine textured indigenous grasses such as browntop bent and fine fescue.

Golf Course Firmness

A firm and running golf course provides an enjoyable and challenging test for all standards of golfer. Careful management of soil moisture, with regular use of GPS soil moisture meters and modern irrigation systems, combined with drought tolerant browntop bent and fine fescue swards drive surface firmness. During R&A Championships, over 500 moisture measurements per day ensures specific greens and parts of greens receive the accurate irrigation inputs to optimise usage maintaining performance and turf health.

Grass Mix

Playing surfaces dominated by fine textured indigenous browntop bent and fine fescue grasses deliver optimal, durable and consistent year-round playing performance. They are also resilient to the increasing pressures faced by climate change from drought, increased disease and insect pest activity driven by wetter and milder seasons in autumns and winter.

Staffing

Greenkeeping is an extremely skilful profession. The modern greenkeeper is equipped with both skills and experience to create and maintain sustainable golf courses that provide an enjoyable golfing experience for all categories of golfer. The R&A is committed to greenkeeper education which promotes sustainable practices through the Greenkeeper Scholarship Programme and, since its inception in 2004, over 340 scholars have been supported from more than 30 different countries, equating to an investment of circa £1 million.

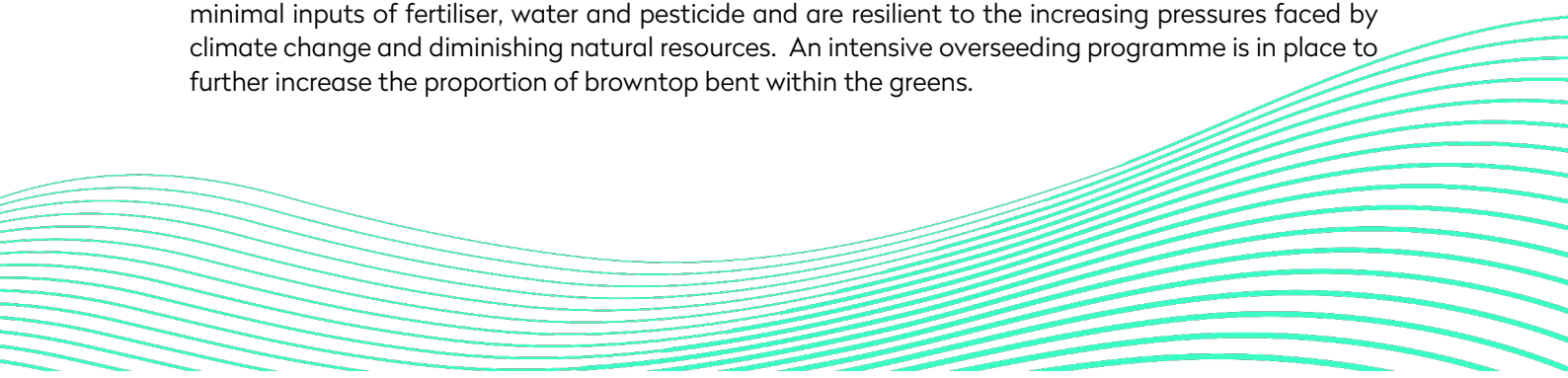
Golf & Nature

AIGWO venues are managed to support and enhance biodiversity to ensure that the golf course sits sympathetically within the natural landscape. Golf courses provide excellent habitat to many protected species such as yellow hammer, linnets, skylark, great crested newts, adder, and natterjack toads. Golf courses can be considered nature reserves in their own right. Vast areas of each golf course are managed entirely for wildlife, e.g., coastal grasslands with varying amounts of scrub, lowland heathlands, and calcareous grasslands.

Agronomy CEO Briefing Notes – Walton Heath

Grass Mix

The Walton Heath greens are dominated by fine textured and indigenous browntop bent grasses with over 60% browntop bent. These natural surfaces provide consistent year-round performance, with minimal inputs of fertiliser, water and pesticide and are resilient to the increasing pressures faced by climate change and diminishing natural resources. An intensive overseeding programme is in place to further increase the proportion of browntop bent within the greens.



Staffing

A total of 36 greenkeepers form the team each morning for course set-up. The Home Team of 23 is supplemented by 13 volunteers with 10 of these being female greenkeepers from across the UK & Ireland. The female greenkeeping volunteers were invited to the 2023 AIGWO in collaboration with Walton Heath Golf Club, BIGGA and The R&A to promote diversity in greenkeeping.

Golf & Nature

The golf courses at Walton Heath Golf Club lie within Walton and Banstead Heath Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), selected for the diversity of habitats and species present.

The majority of the land between golf holes is lowland heathland / dry acid grassland. Features of lowland heathland include scattered and clumped trees and scrub, bracken, areas of bare ground, areas of acid grassland, gorse, heather, and open water – all of which are present at Walton Heath.

Patches of common heather, bell heather and a small amount of cross-leaved heather are present across the golf course within a wider area of acid grassland with dominant common bent and frequent to occasional red fescue, and sweet vernal grass. Lowland mixed deciduous woodlands border the golf course which are predominantly pedunculate oak with silver birch. Other species in the mid-canopy and understorey include sycamore, hawthorn, holly, field maple, rowan, elder and crab apple. A small pocket of aspen is also present alongside the 16th hole.

The lowland heathland and dry grasslands habitats are home to a total of 184 species with 37 being protected or notable. Of the notable bird species, including both amber and red listed birds of conservation concern are linnet, skylark and stonechat. Insects and butterflies including the cinnabar moth and small heath butterfly and reptiles including adder and grass snake, are all found across the site at Walton Heath.

Management prior to the AIGWO and during the staging process is specifically geared to ensuring wildlife is protected at all times.

Machinery

All electric triple mowers are being used to prepare the greens. Fairways are cut with diesel mowers. The Club aims to increase electric machinery in its fleet when suitable technologies are available.

