

Greens update - March 2025

Staff

As was written in the previous report, Broomieknowe and I are very privileged to have such a talented greenstaff. The team has shown tremendous resilience through the last few months and have maintained a high work ethic through some of the more challenging work. Each one of them are not only showcasing their ability as a greenkeeper, but are also growing in their vocation, which is reflecting in their work on the course.

Staff morale remains high as we begin to enter the summer season. It has also been a pleasure for us to be involved in other areas of the club. The greenstaff entered a team into the most recent captain's charity quiz, we were also joined by our former summer worker and my wife (who cleans our bothy every Friday). It was a very good night although we didn't beat Jeffs team.

Staff Training

Jack is on track to finish his Level 3 Turf Management course this July, the college has been very impressed with his development and are recommending he continue his development and apply for the HNC Turf Management course. Considering that this would be funded by Skill Scotland, I am encouraging Jack to pursue this.

We are still awaiting a start date for Matthews Level 3 course. The college has received a large influx of students, which has delayed this.

All staff have now completed their woodchipper training and James and Jack also completed their Pole Saw Training. The instructor of this course highlighted that we should also seek to send staff on the forestry first aid course, as the basic first aid course does not cover the risks that occur in our roles.

Volunteers

Again, I want to take the time to highlight how lucky we are to have such a brilliant group of volunteers, who show up every week regardless of the weather or job. Over the past month they have been primarily picking up sticks left behind from high winds and our tree work, this keeps the course looking clean and tidy but is a very tedious job. I am grateful for the positive attitude while doing this.

Holidays and illness.

We have had a few illnesses, as is expected, over the winter months. To the credit of the staff, many have still made it in before having to be sent home. While I do not encourage this, it shows how willing they are to work and how they are not taking advantage of their sick leave. All holidays will be taken before the middle April, despite the policy stating they should be taken before the end of March. With the busy year we

have had and with it being my first full year in charge, I have been lenient on this policy guidance, but this will be an exception.

Course update

It has been a very different winter in comparison to last year; In January of 2024, we observed a high rainfall of 147mm, whereas this year we only recorded 49mm in the month, that's a 66% decrease!

I have been disappointed in the greens this winter, at times even embarrassed. The disease scarring was a frustrating episode, however as highlighted in my previous reports, it is to be expected considering the record high in disease pressure that we experienced.

Greens

We have been proactive over the winter, doing everything we can to improve the greens surface at the worst part of the year. To do this, we have spread multiple applications of **Calcium Carbonate** through these months. By doing this, we are able to increase the soil Ph and create a nutritious foundation for healthy turf to grow. We have also carried out the application of **bio-stimulants** and **wetting agents** at regular intervals. This helps the breakdown of soil, allowing again for healthier plant growth.

To counteract the disease scarring, we applied a slow-release **Granular Methylene Urea**. We are now starting to see new, healthy, grass sprout through the disease scarring, even in this late stage of winter.

The greens have been aerated twice with the **Verti-Drain** at different depth, further improving the natural drainage. While this causes small disruptions to the playing surfaces, we are beginning to see the resilience of our greens during less favourable weather conditions.

We hired the **Air2G2** again in December to provide an aeration boost to our greens. We are seeing such a remarkable benefit of this machine that the club has decided to purchase a second-hand model. This will allow us to save on hiring costs, as well as allow us to use it more frequently throughout the year.

The **11th green** is still undergoing maintenance work to remove the excess surface water that appears during every wet spell. We have discovered a line of clay through the green that is 14" deep and 4" thick with a sand subsoil beneath, this will have an effect on the permeation of the green. I believe that this has been artificially constructed under the green, as it was common practice to do so in a time before automatic irrigation as it would better hold moisture through the summer months.

To overcome this and allow drainage, we have drilled in a variety of bores through this clay and filled it with **root zone** (*figure 1*). This has been **surprisingly successful** but is only a temporary solution. Next year, we should seek to lift the turf and replace the clay

with sand from the Horsey Field allowing for better draining on the green. This can thankfully be done in-house as this would be an expensive job if done by a 3rd party.



Figure 1: Brown material on the board is clay, the yellow is sand

Other areas of the course

Throughout the winter, the **Verti-Drain** has been active aerating fairways, tees, approaches and walkways. We have even dedicated extra time to weaker areas of the course. This is an essential practice that must be carried out annually if we want to maintain healthy, free-draining turf.

As you walk the course, you will also see that the staff have removed the shrub that was hiding the wall between the **9th and 10th hole**. We feel that the wall plays a significant role in the courses character, and we want to showcase this as much as possible. With this in mind, we also removed a significant portion of the shrubbery that surrounded the pond so that golfers could have a clearer view of where they keep losing their golf balls.

Drainage

We have recently installed a **600m** deep drain at the back of the **9th green**. In addition to this, we created **two swales** with gully pots at their delta. These measures will reduce the amount of water that was getting onto the green and damaging the plant.

Following the completion of work at the 9th, we took on the challenge of the hill at the **10th tee**. For those that have walked up it, you will all know the severity of the situation here. Even through the summer, the ground is marshy and is never suitable to walk on never mind cut. Upon investigation we found that the foundation underneath was purely wet runny sand, which explains the condition of this area.

This was a particularly unenjoyable task, while we were laying **5 metres** of drainage pipe, we were constantly battling with the soil collapsing in on us which you can see in the photo below (*Figure 2*).



Figure 2: Running sand highlighted in the red

While we had the digger out on the course, we chose to clear out the ditch that runs between the **4th** and the **10th** which was filled with a lot of debris (*Figure 3*) Underneath the leaves and debris that engulfed it, we discovered a couple of tile drains from the 4th fairway. After clearing these out, the water initially ran a red-ish hue (*Figure 4*), but cleared up after a while and should help the drainage in this area.



Figure 3: Debris found in the drains



Figure 4: Newly discovered tile drains running again.

Furthering our pursuit to aesthetic improvement, we constructed retaining walls around the pipes at the ditch between the 4th and 9th (*Figure 5*). I believe this adds a significant improvement to the look of an area that has been a worry of mine last year.



Figure 5: Drainage pipe before (left) and after, with newly constructed wall (right)

The chamber near the A7 at the Harbro area is still causing concern. We initially fitted a battery pump with a float switch, but that could not keep up with the water coming into the chamber. To remedy this, we have borrowed a **2" petrol water pump** from **MowerTec** to pump out this water twice daily. We have been borrowing this pump for 3 months now, free of charge, this is just another example on the beneficial relationship we have with **MowerTec**.

While we have a temporary solution to this issue, it is not sustainable and need to seek a long-term fix as this could have an impact on any further drainage work, we do at this part of the course. **Neil Reid** has contacted **Midlothian Council**, as the contractors who built the A7 have left us with this big problem.

Storm Éowyn and tree work

We have had a busy winter with our work regarding the trees on the course. We have removed a significant number of trees at the **4th, 11th and 13th green**, as well as at the **10th and 12th tee**. This will hopefully improve light exposure on these softer areas, as well as encouraging better air circulation. We will however have to keep assessing this area to make sure we have the best results possible. You can see the light exposure our course gets throughout the year by following the link below. This was a great find by a member of our staff.

<https://shademap.app/@55.88328,-3.09879,16.58354z,1739445540898t,-21.62396b,0p,2m!1739432599291!1739466762116>

The storm at the end of January brought down **12 trees** as well as a number of large limbs. Clearing the aftermath of this required a significant amount of manpower and delayed any other work that had to be done around the course, but needs must!

We have now removed **400 stumps** from around the course! Even more impressively, this was able to be completed in just **one week**, as the staff worked in split shifts to allow us to achieve such a quick turnaround. We are still backfilling spaces that these stumps have left but should be finished by the end of the week.

There are still a few larger stumps that are still to be removed, but they require machinery that we do not have at our immediate disposal. We have planned for this to be completed around **April/May** time when the ground is firmer.

Bunkers

All bunker work was completed at the end of **December 2024**. This included fixing the irrigation, installing lining, and turfing around the bunkers. We are still in the process of topping these bunkers up with sand, but this will be completed well before the start of the season.

Machinery

We have been continuing to complete continuous maintenance work to our machinery all throughout the year. In recent time, James completed sharpening on all of our cutting units as well as replacing worn and faulty parts. By doing this, it allows for a better, more efficient cut when being used.

We have also given the **tractor mounted rough mower** that we use to cut rough a paint job (*Figure 6*). Since we bought this second-hand, it needed some TLC that we could not provide during the summer months.



Figure 6: Rough Mower before paint job (left) and after (right)

Going Forward – Our Next Steps

As we move towards summer, I am hopeful that the weather will be in our favour and will encourage some much-needed growth. I have already spread **fertiliser** in particularly worn areas, so that if (and when) we do get an increase in growth potential, we should see a much greater recovery in these areas.

Tees will be realigned and cut out as we prepare for the start of competition season. We also plan to **rake, cut and blow** the fairways and semi-rough. We will also be topping up sparse bunkers and trimming around all bunker faces. All these changes will not only benefit the playing experience of the course, but also the **aesthetic appearance** of the course.

Irrigation will be our primary focus in the next few months. Many of the irrigations heads that surround the greens have sunk, impacting the overall efficacy of the irrigation system. We will also be replacing heads that are leaking and resetting the water arcs of all the pop ups, to make sure they are doing the job they are purposed for. These maintenance tasks are particularly challenging as we have **4** different irrigation heads around the course, which all have different water outputs, in turn affecting the pressure of pop-ups nearby. As we do our maintenance, I plan to change these heads out with more appropriate, modern heads.

We have just had an audit of the irrigation system completed by **TIS** on the **6th of March**. I am keen to hear their opinions on next steps for our course as I believe we will have critical problems that will need addressed. Our irrigation system is our **most important tool** that we have on the course, and it cannot be ignored or not held as a high priority. If we overlook essential maintenance, we may experience serious damage during dry spells.

Conclusion

I am very happy with how the past few months have gone. The staff have worked very hard in some very difficult conditions and have showcased their worth at every turn. I am hopeful of an improvement in comparison to last summer and I am beginning to see the changes that I have made bear positive returns. Maintaining continuous investment is crucial for us to continue moving forward. If we do not move forward, we move backwards. I look forward to the challenge of summer.

Happy Golfing

Billy Hudson
Head Greenkeeper
10th Match 2025