THE R&A GOLF COURSE COMMITTEE

SUSTAINABLE GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

- The R&A advocates and promotes the sustainable development and management of golf courses around the globe.

- In 2002, The R&A Golf Course Committee was formed to take this initiative forward, while assisting the game of golf with the challenge of improving its environmental and social credentials.

Sustainable golf course development and management can be defined as:

“Optimising the playing quality of the golf course, in harmony with the conservation of its natural environment, under economically sound and socially responsible management.”

The objectives of The R&A in this regard are:

- to provide and promote best practice guidelines
- to encourage sustainable golf course development and management through the implementation of best practice
- to act as a positive influence on the formulation of policies and legislation.

The R&A recognises its obligation to contribute to the conservation of the environment in which golf is played and is committed to:

- promoting and encouraging practices which minimise the impact of the game on the environment and which enhance biodiversity
- enhancing the understanding and application of sound habitat management practices.

The major issues which impact on the development of the game in this regard include water resources, pesticide and fertiliser use, energy provision, waste management and environmental conservation.

Sustainable golf courses are successful and secure financial ventures which deliver a good value-for-money product to customers. This means an enjoyable golfing experience on well-managed playing surfaces in attractive natural settings. Golf courses can often make a very important contribution to natural ecosystems by providing habitat for local wildlife. For local communities, golf courses can be important sources of employment, while also providing valuable recreational and social benefits for local people.

There are four components to sustainability for golf courses: playing performance, economic performance, environmental stewardship and social responsibility.
THE FOUR PARAMETERS OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR GOLF COURSES

Economic performance

Playing performance

Sustainable development and management

Environmental stewardship

Social responsibility
PLAYING PERFORMANCE

- Challenging and enjoyable golf courses.
- Natural variability of playing surfaces with changing weather and seasons.
- The aim is for firm, dry and healthy surfaces.
- Consideration needs to be given to these issues during both the design phase of new course developments and also the on-going turf management programmes at existing courses.
- Establishing and maintaining optimum playing conditions by selecting the correct turfgrass for your climate zone can save a lot of money through far reduced management costs.
- Healthy turfgrass will need less fertiliser and water and will also be less susceptible to pests and diseases. Expenditure on pesticides, herbicides and fungicides will also be considerably reduced.
- Close attention must be paid to issues such as:
  - moisture levels
  - organic matter content
  - surface firmness, smoothness and trueness.
- These factors will all have an impact on green speed.
- Recording and measuring such aspects of the performance of your course is a valuable step to take in order to enhance your decision making capabilities.
ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

- Materials costs are rising all around the world and we are also in a global economic recession.
- Golf courses are businesses and to operate securely, there must be the correct balance between income and expenditure.
- Income can be maximised by offering affordable, enjoyable and good value-for-money golf to your customers for as much of the year as possible. This will mean working to avoid all possible issues which could cause the greens and/or the course to be closed for maintenance.
- High standards of playing performance in attractive natural settings will encourage both more visitors and members to your course.
- Following best practice turf management guidelines will help to reduce and limit expenditure on water, chemicals and other expensive materials; this will keep your profit margins high.
- Economic efficiency in the operation of your course can be maximised by ensuring you have a suitable number of correctly trained and motivated staff who are equipped with all the necessary machinery to carry out work safely and effectively.
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Golf courses are components of the wider natural landscape and, as such, have an inherent responsibility to be responsible managers of the natural environment.

- Environmental stewardship can be defined as the preservation, conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, through an informed management approach.

- Environmental issues such as pollution, habitat loss and climate change are becoming of increasing focus for governments all around the world and industries which are not seen to be working proactively to improve their operation in these areas will be penalised. Golf is no exception.

- Golf courses are sometimes perceived to be intensive users of water and chemicals which are associated with damage to natural ecosystems.

- This misunderstanding and poor public perception is a priority to be addressed.

- In fact, there are now an increasing number of courses around the world which are making a positive contribution to the environment by providing important habitat for wildlife, while also increasing ecosystem quality by reducing usage of water and chemicals.
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Golf courses are usually situated in close proximity to communities of local people.
- As such, the management of golf courses have a responsibility to ensure that the operation of the course interacts and engages positively with society.
- This means working to reduce waste while ensuring that which is generated is managed responsibly and in-line with local regulations.
- All precautions should be taken to minimise situations where pollution could occur and effective communication must be undertaken with local groups of people so that they understand your commitment to operating as a responsible organisation.
- The benefits to nature which golf courses can provide can be enjoyed by all local people, often providing important areas of recreational green space in what can be otherwise very urban areas.
- Working to reduce total energy usage while also investigating possibilities for incorporating renewables into your portfolio are two steps which can be taken to address growing concerns over both fuel costs and global climate change.
SUSTAINABILITY = FORWARD THINKING AND PLANNING

Through successfully combining all of these parameters into your management approach, you can develop long-term resilience, security and success in your business operations.

Sustainability should be at the core of the strategy for your business.
There are tools available to help you record how your course is performing and thereby to assess the effectiveness of your management approach over time.

Communicating your efforts to all those involved with, and affected by, the operation of your golf course will be a key step to take in order to win people’s support and enthusiasm.
THE R&A

Through the commercial success of The Open Championship, The R&A is able to invest in projects undertaken for the benefit of golf worldwide. This work includes efforts to enhance the management and development of sustainable golf facilities.
More information on sustainable development and management is available from The R&A’s ‘The Golf Course’ website:

www.randa.org/thegolfcourse

The R&A is committed to working for golf and supports the growth of the game internationally and the development and management of sustainable golf facilities. The R&A operates with the consent of 143 organisations from the amateur and professional game and on behalf of over thirty million golfers in 128 countries.