

THE OPEN

CHAMPIONSHIP

Celebrating 150 Years



The Old Course

A guide to the environmental management
of the Links for wildlife conservation



11 – 18 July
ST ANDREWS 2010



Introduction

I have great pleasure in introducing this booklet produced for The Open Championship 2010. This year we return to St Andrews for the 28th time and it promises to be a very special week as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first playing of the Championship.

The purpose of this publication is to raise awareness of the ongoing environmental work to protect and improve the important wildlife and habitats found on and around St Andrews Links. It is one of a series of booklets produced for each of our Open Championships, and the third on the Old Course. The first of these, in 2000, concentrated on the wildlife to be seen around the Links. The 2005 publication considered the wider environmental management programme implemented by the Links Trust. This year, the booklet focuses on habitat management across the Links – the cornerstone of enhancing the wildlife value of golf courses and very appropriate given that the United Nations has declared 2010 as *The International Year of Biodiversity*.

This publication demonstrates the commitment of The R&A to promoting best environmental practice and sustainable development in golf course management. To learn more, visit our website www.bestcourseforgolf.org

The R&A also takes great care when planning for an Open Championship to reduce the impact of the event on the habitats and wildlife at the venue. We work closely with statutory agencies to minimise disturbance and to ensure the course continues to be a valuable habitat long after the Championship is over.

This booklet is the result of collaboration between The R&A, the Scottish Golf Environment Group, St Andrews Links Trust and the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. We are particularly grateful to the Scottish Golf Union, Scottish Natural Heritage and Lexus for their financial contribution towards its production and I very much hope it enhances your visit to this year's Open at the Home of Golf.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Peter Dawson'.

Peter Dawson
Chief Executive, The R&A



About this guide

This booklet has been produced to raise awareness of the ongoing environmental programme of work that St Andrews Links Trust and its partners is undertaking to ensure the nationally and internationally important wildlife and habitats found on and around the famous Old Course are protected and enhanced. It gives a guide to the gorse, grassland and heather management undertaken across the Links, that is important in protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations. It also looks at the coastal protection works carried out by the Links Trust at the nearby Eden Estuary and West Sands, and the environmental impacts that were addressed during the design and construction of the new Castle Course.

Environmental stewardship is one of the key elements of truly sustainable development. It, and especially biodiversity, is often a casualty of human expansion and the drive for financial profit. Economic performance is also a measure of sustainability but this has to be achieved in balance with care for the environment and a sense of responsibility to the needs of society. St Andrews is an excellent example of successful sustainable development and this booklet demonstrates the biodiversity benefits from the Links Trust's habitat management efforts, which contribute to the financial success of its golf business which is vital to the vibrancy of the town of St Andrews and the well being of its inhabitants.

The R&A

Based in St Andrews, The R&A is golf's governing body and the organiser of The Open Championship. The R&A is committed to working for golf and operates with the consent of 141 organisations, from the amateur and professional game, and on behalf of over 30 million golfers in 126 countries.

The R&A also provides guidance on all aspects of the sustainable development and management of golf courses, through its website **www.bestcourseforgolf.org**

In addition to best practice guidelines, the site provides case studies and tools (benchmarking and checklist) to help courses work towards greater sustainability.

St Andrews Links Trust

St Andrews Links Trust is a charitable organisation established in 1974 entrusted with the operation, maintenance and development of the golf courses and facilities on the Links. At the heart of the Links is the Old Course, but it has another four 18 hole courses and a nine hole course alongside it. These are all public courses and with the seventh course, The Castle Course, on a site to the south east of St Andrews, the Links Trust is responsible for the largest public golf complex in Europe.

The management and greenkeeping teams at St Andrews Links are dedicated to ensuring that the Links has world class quality playing surfaces while promoting excellent environmental management practices.

In the high season the Links Trust employs over 300 people including around 100 greenkeeping staff to ensure that the Home of Golf lives up to the expectations of visiting golfers who enjoy 100,000 rounds of golf every year.

The Scottish Golf Union

The Scottish Golf Union (SGU) is the governing body for men's amateur golf in Scotland, a federation of area associations incorporating more than 580 golf clubs across the country representing a total membership of approximately 250,000 golfers.

The SGU's role is focused on growing the game from grass roots level, increasing the number of participants playing golf, encouraging club membership and making the game more accessible to all. A key component of this strategy is clubgolf, a national junior golf programme for Scotland.

The Union also aim to develop talent and give every player the opportunity to fulfill their potential and they have established 'Pathways', a world class coaching and development programme working with golfers from entry level to the high performance end of the game. The SGU provides a range of support services to clubs across all aspects of the business of golf to ensure a healthy and sustainable golf club environment in Scotland.

The Scottish Golf Environment Group

The Scottish Golf Environment Group (SGEG) is a wholly owned subsidiary company of the SGU with funding support also coming from The R&A and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Through visits to golf facilities in Scotland, SGEG advises on habitat management and species conservation and routinely delivers best practice advice on waste management, energy conservation, climate change, sustainable drainage, water use, landscape, heritage and general environmental issues. SGEG also coordinates and awards the Scottish Golf Environment Certificates, recognising excellence in environmental management on golf courses.

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is the devolved government agency which aims to secure the conservation and enhancement of our natural heritage.

Its goals are to help people enjoy Scotland's natural heritage responsibly, adding to the quality of people's lives, making

environments close to where people live more attractive and creating opportunities for people to enjoy, learn about and get involved with their natural heritage. SNH aims to make sure people benefit from their natural heritage tomorrow through looking after it today. SNH has a network of area offices through which it can advise on and, where appropriate, grant aid natural heritage improvement projects and environmental educational work on golf courses.

Fife Coast and Countryside Trust

The Trust was formed in 1999 by Fife Council and its partners, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Enterprise Fife and the Kingdom of Fife Tourist Board. It is a registered environmental charity. The objectives of the Trust are to manage, conserve and enhance the biodiversity and countryside of Fife. The Trust manages the Fife Coastal Path, Lomond Hills Regional Park and several Local Nature Reserves on behalf of Fife Council. It encourages informed, responsible public access to the landscape and the wildlife resources of Fife and looks to secure the sustainable use, management and enjoyment of the countryside of Fife.

Lexus

Lexus, as a Patron of The Open Championship, is pleased to provide a player courtesy car service that will be entirely conducted with a fleet of full hybrid cars. Lexus Hybrid Drive is a quantum leap in automotive technology, delivering stunning performance with remarkably low CO₂ emissions and improved fuel economy.

Thanks to the combined efforts of The R&A and Lexus, The Open Championship provides a perfect opportunity to highlight practical ways in which environmental objectives can be pursued.



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St Andrews Links and The Castle Course

The Links and surrounding area accommodate many nationally and internationally important habitats. The Eden Estuary and some sections of the coast have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). The estuary is also part of a Ramsar Site, a wetland of international importance, especially for waterfowl.

The Links is positioned strategically within this framework of important habitats. All of the seven courses managed by the Links Trust provide important recreation for the people of St Andrews and the many visitors attracted to the area. They also harbour a wide range of locally and nationally scarce and declining species. Many of the species and habitats found on and around the Links are listed in the Fife's Local Biodiversity Action Plan, a local strategy taking forward the aims of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The playing surfaces on the courses are an integral component of the surrounding environment in which they co-exist. The Links constitutes a diverse mosaic of habitats that significantly increase the nature conservation importance of the site, providing a diversity of vegetation, which in turn provides a home for a wide range of wildlife. This indirectly benefits the golfers using the courses by providing a beautiful backdrop to their game.

All of the courses are managed by St Andrews Links Trust, whose responsibility is to maintain, protect and preserve the Links for future generations. The Trust's management team must consider recreation, golf, wildlife and topographical issues in their long-term plans for the Links. The Links Trust consult the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) who have produced Management Plans covering the different areas for each of the courses, which includes the monitoring and control of scrub in order to maintain the health and balance of these habitats, for the sake of the golfer as well as the wildlife.

Without management there would be a gradual loss of the important dune grassland and associated areas of heather as species such as gorse take over. The dominance of gorse leads to a loss of the dune topography and a marked reduction in ecological value. In time this results in the exclusion of some species such as skylark, meadow pipit and brown hare, and an increase in others like chaffinch, yellowhammer and linnet. Therefore, the ultimate aim of management must be to retain a mosaic of habitats for the benefit of as many different species as possible.

The Castle Course, originally agricultural land, is the seventh course at the Home of Golf. Set on a prominent cliff top position overlooking St Andrews, the course combines breathtaking views with a memorable golfing challenge. The town of St Andrews is linked to the site of the golf course by a stretch of coast called Kinkell Braes, which is designated a SSSI. It supports a mosaic of habitats including salt marsh, brackish fens, base rich flushes, neutral grassland and scrub.

Management on all courses must be directed, appropriate and ongoing and St Andrews Links is an exemplar of what can be achieved with committed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff. One of the most difficult tasks greenkeepers face is to get local and visiting golfers alike to appreciate the demands of sustainable course management and this relies on communication in all its guises, this booklet being one such method.



The Castle Course

Gorse on the Links

Gorse is recognised as an important feature of the Links but one which requires some management intervention. Gorse will become leggy and degenerate without management, losing its capacity to regenerate. As the gorse ages, it becomes more open and depreciates in value for wildlife. It is important to manage the gorse to retain a diversity of structure so as to provide the maximum number of ecological niches throughout the course.

Gorse can also spread outwards into areas of heather and dune grassland. This is a natural process, referred to as vegetative succession but can result in the loss of the mosaic habitat pattern.

As it competes for light, gorse will grow and hide the natural topography of the dunes, resulting in one bland, overall height, rather than the more interesting skyline that the drought and salt resistant marram and sea lyme grasses provide.



Gorse in flower

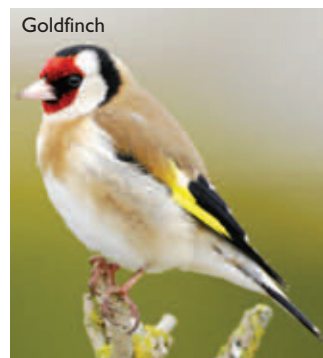


Gorse regeneration

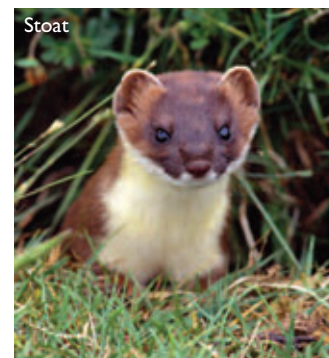
Wildlife value

Gorse is integral to the character of the courses, adding colour when in flower, and year round structure, texture and challenge. Gorse scrub in particular is an important wildlife habitat, providing perching, feeding and nesting habitat for a variety of birds such as whitethroat, yellowhammer, red bibbed linnet, stonechat and goldfinch. It also provides cover for the many small mammals such as voles, mice and shrews that are the main food source for weasels, stoats, owls and kestrels.

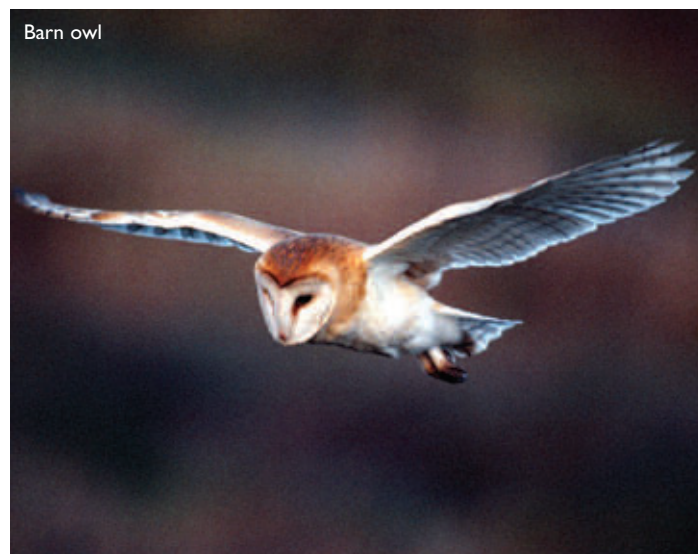
Stoats and weasels can be valuable allies on the golf course. They predate heavily on rabbits, as well as on other small mammals and birds. They favour rocky crevices and burrows as habitat. Creation of rock piles in rough grass and gorse thickets, and maintenance of dry stone dykes, like that alongside the 14th hole of the Old Course, will contribute to a healthy population of both species.



Goldfinch



Stoat



Barn owl

Gorse management

All Links Trust courses have Gorse Management plans. From a golfing and Open Championship perspective, gorse if unmanaged will affect sight-lines, prevent spectator vantage and restrict access. Therefore, there is a need to contain the spread of gorse through physical removal on a selective and ongoing basis. Topping the gorse in carry areas every 3 to 4 years ensures it retains its youthful characteristics for a longer time period than it would naturally, allowing sight-lines to be maintained.

Topping the gorse shrubs, down to a height of between 15 to 30 centimetres, and selective and rotational de-limbing/coppicing is practised to ensure the gorse retains its juvenility to perpetuity. This management aim is ideal for wildlife and creates an interesting and attractive challenge for the golfer.

On the Old Course, 80% of the gorse lining the 4th and 14th holes has been removed to prevent encroachment into the heather. The 6th and 7th holes have also seen extensive gorse management. Where gorse has been removed elsewhere there has been a light seeding of fescue-dominated seed mix containing sweet vernal-grass. Greenkeepers used chainsaws and hand saws to remove gorse limbs, along with a tractor mounted flail mower and a JCB to pull roots out where required.

Management will bring about a number of indirect benefits, one of the main being a marked increase in bare sand. This is a vital habitat and one that is important for the overall ecological functioning of the Links. As gorse and the underlying detritus are removed clean sand is exposed. Birds use such areas to dust down, reptiles such as the common lizard use them to bask, and mining bees and wasps burrow into them. Bare sand will allow more sensitive plant species to colonise, providing colour and interest before the more competitive species take over again.

Inevitably with succession, gorse will re-invade bare sand in an attempt to reinstate a dominant climax community. Therefore, greenkeepers return to areas on a cyclical basis in order for gorse management to be successful.

The Trust purchased a chipper in 2002 to process the cut gorse. These chippings are composted along with grass clippings collected through the summer. The compost is then given away free of charge to anyone who wants it.

See the map on page 28/29 for key areas of gorse management.

Gorse cut back to ease spectator access alongside the 14th hole



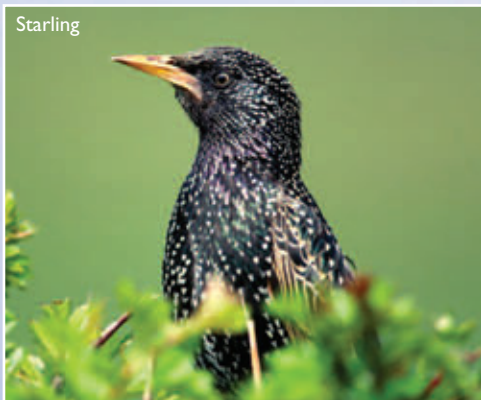
View to the 4th and 14th green over the gorse, Old Course

Grassland on the Links

The grasslands over the Links vary considerably given the degree of management. These range from the amenity grasslands in the playing areas, to the rough ecological grasslands on the course through to the unmanaged fixed dune grasslands where marram is still an important component.

Rough ecological grassland, managed for wildlife, is beneficial to the golfer if in the correct balance and place. Wildflowers depend on fine leaved, slow growing grasses that are also desirable on the golf course. Thick, rank grassland that is undesirable for golf also smothers flowers.

Starling



Wildlife value

There is a great diversity of native flora in the ecological rough grasslands, including colourful plants such as lady's bedstraw, harebell, kidney vetch, common centaury, eyebright, northern marsh orchid, purple milk vetch, burnet rose, devil's-bit scabious and many more. These plants provide a food source to an abundance of invertebrates which in turn provide food to the large bird populations.

Long rough has been used to create physical linkage between neighbouring habitats or to incorporate isolated habitat features such as off-set specimen trees. The whole notion of this is based on facilitating access for animals between habitat areas. Most evidently this relates to small terrestrial creatures like voles, shrews and mice which do not like crossing bare earth or short grass as they have no cover. However, continuous rough means more efficient hunting and feeding for owls, hedgehogs, foxes and badgers as they don't have as much terrain to cross and their chances of coming across food increases.

It is the range and diversity of grasslands that is so important for wildlife on the Links. All areas have value for different bird species. Pied wagtail, starling, rook, meadow pipit and skylark will all use the playing surfaces for feeding. Ground-nesting birds such as grey partridge and lapwing are confined to more out of play zones and rough grass areas provide superb small mammal habitat which in turn entice owls, kestrels, buzzards and other raptors to visit the golf course.

Grey partridge



Grassland management

It is best practice to break up the grassland sward so wildflowers can establish, removing all cuttings to prevent thick, rank growth. The marginal rough provides a buffer between the fairways and the more off-line areas. It is managed via infrequent cutting to maintain a thin sward that will enable ball retrieval and onward play; indirectly extending the area of available rough for wildlife.

All grass clippings from greens, tees, aprons and fairways are collected and then composted, mostly with the gorse chippings but some along with sand, soil, turf and other materials, to be used again as divot mix, packing behind bunker faces, topdressings and in construction work. Every low season, working on a rotational plan, areas of deep rough will be cut back and the cuttings collected to produce a thinner, wispier “fringing rough” where it is easier to find a golf ball as well as producing a better habitat for ground-nesting birds such as skylark.

See the plan on page 28/29 for key areas of grassland management.



Skylark

Gorse encroaching into grassland



Gorse has been cut back to re-establish dune grassland

Heather on the Links

Heather is important on the Links but has been reduced in extent over time through trampling pressures and a gradual encroachment of the surrounding grasses and gorse. Heather is susceptible to trampling pressures and becomes more vulnerable to the competitive encroaching grasses as a consequence.



Bell
heather

Wildlife value

Healthy heather stock supports a range of insects including beetles, spiders, bumble bees, butterflies and moths. The bees and moths feed on the nectar from the flowers. Reptiles will find cover in the heather, basking in any broken ground within the stand. The wildlife value of heather varies with the age of the stand. The young shoots of regenerating heather provide a food source for many moorland birds and animals, also attracting birds such as the skylark and golden plover, who find cover here to nest and raise their young. Older, woodier and taller heather areas provide shelter for brown hares from adverse weather and predators.



Heather to the 9th carry, Old Course



White tailed bumblebee



Brown hare



Ling and Bell heather

Heather management

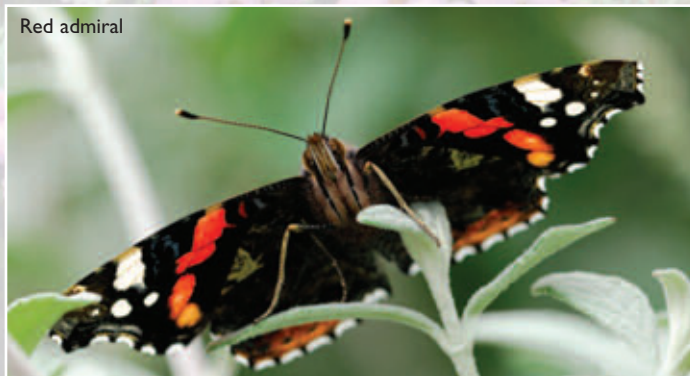
Traditionally heather is managed through a series of controlled burns called Muirburn, which if carried out well can help regenerate it, benefitting livestock and wildlife. Burning is temporarily unsightly and may necessitate course closure on safety grounds. It is therefore rarely used on golf courses.

Burning removes the woody part of the plant, and underlying litter. It helps to 'chit' the heather seed and encourages germination, although it is important that the burn does not go deeper and into the soil. This is a safety hazard and it will also kill off the plants and seed bank, resulting in the growth of rank, weedy species rather than encouraging the heather to regenerate. On land with such open access as St Andrews Links, burning is unrealistic and alternatives have to be found which try to replicate the value of a burn. Mechanical management is a more realistic and achievable method. Management of heather on the Links involves periodic cordoning, traffic management, appropriate communication, relaxed cutting and weed control.

The Links Trust has a Heather Management Plan and one of its main aims is to produce a mosaic of heather patches of different ages across the Links. This increases the diversity of wildlife that the heather can sustain. Another main aim is to reduce competition from grasses by opening up the heather and encouraging its expansion. This is undertaken by turf stripping, scarification, returfing with heather turves and reseedling work.

St Andrews Links Trust gained permission for a team of staff to go to a nearby location in early winter to strip seed from the heather which was then scattered in areas of bare soil adjacent to existing heather areas to speed up the process of the heather regeneration. Most of this has taken place off the Old Course but this process will produce heather to transfer to areas on the Old as heather turves.

See the plan on page 28/29 for key areas of heather management.



Red admiral

Coastal erosion – protecting the Links

The famous West Sands and the area at the far end of the Old, New and Jubilee courses, where the long beach meets the Eden Estuary, are popular visitor destinations. The estuary, mudflats and sandbanks that lead up to the high water mark on the Pilmour Links and the Out Head sand dunes are in an area that enjoys international protection for its wintering birds through Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site designations.

The soft dunes along West Sands beach and the Out Head area have always protected the land from the forces of the sea but are becoming more vulnerable due to changing climatic conditions, future projected sea level rises and potential increases in extreme weather events.

The historic, recreational and economic value of St Andrews Links means that there is a need to protect these areas. Following considerable research, St Andrews Links Trust in partnership with Fife Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust has taken various coastal protection measures over the last decade. These have required permissions under the Environmental Impact (Scotland) Regulations and licenses under the Control of Pollution Act (COPA) and the Food and Environment Protection Act (FEPA), which are enforced by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).



West Sands dune erosion

The Eden Estuary Project

In 2001, 100 metres of hard defences were constructed along the eroding dunes at the end of the Jubilee course. This consisted of a line of contoured sloping gabions, which are large metal baskets filled with rocks. These stabilise the dunes and stop the sand from being eroded away by absorbing the energy of the incoming sea.



Gabions under construction



Stacked gabions



Sloping gabions

This was followed further along the coastline with a revised approach; sand recharge. This beach nourishment project buried the installed gabions and built a new 300 metre dune along the remaining soft dune system to the north of the new gabions. Sand was excavated from a part of the sand flats to the north and transported to the dunes by low ground pressure trucks, it was then shaped by bulldozers. These sand flats have been steadily growing in size over the past 20 years. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process ensured that mitigation measures were put in place so there was no significant disturbance to the breeding bird sites, mudflats, sand flat, sand dune and saltmarsh habitats and the common seals that visit the estuary and bask on the sand banks at low tide. Permission for further sand recharge work was given in 2008 to ensure the area continues to be effective in combating the dune erosion.

Sand extraction



Sand recharge on top of dune



Further protection of the sand dunes and sand recharge area was achieved through a softer coastal engineering approach that included chestnut paling fences and marram and sea lyme grass planting. The grass acts as a natural dune stabiliser by trapping and binding sand with their roots and vegetative growth, which also reduces the loss of sand through wind erosion.



Soft coastal engineering

West Sands Dune Restoration Project

When golf was first played in St Andrews over 600 years ago, the Links looked very different from how it does today. It was quite a wild and rugged place with thousands of acres of sand dunes that had been built up since the ice age. Today, the remaining dune system is quite narrow and susceptible to winds and tides and, particularly, to trampling. The dunes are very popular with the many thousands of visitors who come here year round. Over time, the dunes lose the vegetation that binds the sand. This makes them very susceptible to wind and wave action.

The West Sands, made famous around the world in the film “Chariots of Fire” and as a spectacular backdrop to The Open, was the scene of a different sort of race this year. Not a team of athletes running in the surf this time, but a convoy of six huge dump trucks, hauling 14,000 tons of sand from one end of the West Sands to the other. The sand has been used to restore part of an ancient dune system at the Swilken Burn to its original form.

This really was a race against time and tide. Scottish Natural Heritage permitted the removal of sand from a site off Out Head until the end of April to avoid the potential for disturbance to wildlife, especially seals. The contractors had only about five hours to excavate the sand each day – the tide comes in really fast!

This is the first phase of a project to restore the entire West Sands. The work will be guided by a management plan now being developed by a collaboration of local organisations, the West Sands Partnership, with the support of Fife Coast and Countryside Trust through its EU funded SUSCOD (Sustainable Coastal Development in Practice) project. The R&A, the Links Trust, Fife Council and Fife Environment Trust have contributed generously to the project.

The work on the West Sands will also be an opportunity to show people what can be done to restore a wonderful asset, to promote a better understanding of sand dunes and their many values, and to encourage the public to care for them.

The restored dunes and storm debris



Transporting sand

The Castle Course

Prior to planning permission for the new Castle Course, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was required by European law. The procedure required the developer to compile an Environmental Statement (ES) describing the likely significant effects of the development on the environment and proposed mitigation measures. The ES was circulated to statutory consultation bodies and made available to the public for comment. Its contents, together with any comments, were taken into account by the local planning authority before they granted consent.

To evaluate the application the following detailed studies were undertaken:

- Traffic Assessment
- Ecological Assessment
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment
- Hydrology & Flooding Study
- Archaeological Assessment
- Construction Impacts
- Economic Impact Assessment.

Key mitigation measures within these reports included:

- St Andrews Links Trust to commission a Green Transport Plan
- The boundary of the SSSI and development to be seeded with an appropriate mix to develop a buffer strip
- Fence margins to be moved to improve views but still allow for grazing on the SSSI
- The maiden pink plant to be protected during course construction and seed propagated for further enhancement
- The retention of the stone dykes
- A well designed clubhouse, only 4 metres in height, to be constructed with natural materials and with minimal visual impact
- A Turf Management Plan to be prepared.

Maiden pink



The Castle Course coastal buffer

One of the key areas that needed to be addressed in the ES was the hydrology and drainage of the site to ensure increased amounts of surface water would not cause flooding or possible pollution when discharged into the protected SSSI area. This has been addressed in a number of ways:

- Across the course the resulting increased permanent vegetation cover compared to the former bare earth of the arable agriculture land means the total runoff and silt pollution is reduced
- To ensure the course then drained sufficiently following the construction earthworks, the course design included reconnections to existing drainage, landscaping to allow additional surface water to flow through Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) such as swales and ditches, and stream realignment and a retention pond with a controlled out flow
- A Flood Risk Assessment was also carried out to make sure the realignment of the existing stream could cope with increased flows. The design includes an increased length of open stream which provides additional habitats.

Aerial map of the Links showing key areas of Habitat Management



Qualifying courses for The Open Championship 2010

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Can Tiger Woods make history by becoming the first golfer to win The Open for a third time at the Home of Golf?



Useful Contacts and Organisations

THE R&A

St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9JD
Tel: 01334 460000 www.randa.org

ST ANDREWS LINKS TRUST

Pilmour House, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9SF
Tel: 01334 466666 www.standrews.org.uk

SCOTTISH GOLF UNION

The Duke's, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 8NX
Tel: 01334 466477 www.scottishgolf.org

SCOTTISH GOLF ENVIRONMENT GROUP

The Duke's, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 8NX
Tel: 01334 466477 www.sgeg.org.uk

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Great Glen House, Leachkin Road, Inverness, IV3 8NW
Tel: 01463 725000 www.snh.gov.uk

FIFE COAST AND COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

Hot Pot Wynd, Dysart, Fife, KY1 2TQ
Tel: 01592 656080 www.fifecoastandcountryside.co.uk

FIFE COUNCIL

Fife House, North Street, Glenrothes, Fife, KY7 5LT
Tel: 08451 550000 www.fife.gov.uk

GOLF ENVIRONMENT ORGANIZATION

25 Westgate, North Berwick, East Lothian, EH39 4AG
Tel: 01620 895100 www.golfenvironment.org

RSPB SCOTLAND

Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh, EH4 3TP
Tel: 0131 311 6500 www.rspb.org.uk/scotland

SCOTTISH WILDLIFE TRUST

Cramond House, 3 Kirk Cramond, Edinburgh, EH4 6HZ
Tel: 0131 312 7765 www.swt.org.uk

SPORTS TURF RESEARCH INSTITUTE

St Ives Estate, Bingley, West Yorkshire, BD16 1AU
Tel: 01274 565131 www.stri.co.uk

THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

FUTURE VENUES



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