

LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

GOLF COURSES

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

Summary

Although relatively few in number, Lancashire's golf courses can still be important reservoirs for wildlife. As well as providing green spaces and corridors within urban development they play a role in allowing people to gain closer contact with wildlife through recreational activity.

Grassland dominates these sites, however remnants of a diverse range of semi-natural habitats often exist within their boundaries, acting as sanctuaries for biodiversity and supporting many rare habitats and species.

Action Plan Aim

Assess the resource, improve biodiversity of habitats and increase awareness of the value of golf courses and their contribution to biodiversity.

Habitat Description

In Lancashire, golf courses are relatively few in number but can be large in area. They have a role in providing places where people can gain closer contact with wildlife through recreational activity. All are managed primarily for their sporting or amenity purpose. However, they can still be important reservoirs for wildlife in urban fringe settings. In addition, they provide green spaces and corridors within urban development and contribute to the health and well-being of local people and their connectedness with the natural world.

In addition to the grassland that dominates these sites, remnants of a diverse range of semi-natural habitats are often found within their boundaries or next to them. These may have been in existence for many years, providing well-established continuity of biodiversity. They can also act as sanctuaries for biodiversity as, outside of the managed areas, they often receive relatively little human interference. (Boniface. 2002. unpublished) This is particularly true of the "rough".

National Status

Across the country, golf courses have been recognised for their importance to biodiversity by being associated with both statutory and non-statutory land designations. In Great Britain a total of 95 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

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are found on 105 golf courses (English Nature undated. Boniface. 2002). Consequently, BAP priority habitats and species will often be found within their boundaries. Water features are also common on golf courses and these may support BAP priority species such as Great Crested Newt and Water Vole.

Central and local government are attaching greater importance to improving human quality of life in urban situations through the provision of urban greenspaces and resultant increases in contact with biodiversity. Accessible golf courses can play a role in this.

Regional Status

Information on golf course biodiversity has not been collated on a regional basis. However the "links" (*i.e.* sand dune derived) courses of Sefton Metropolitan Borough, Merseyside form a significant component of the Sefton Coast cSAC, which is of international importance.

Local Status

The Lancashire Phase 1 Habitat Survey (Kelly & Harwood, English Nature 1993) mapped 5,890 ha of amenity grassland, which amounts to 1.9% of the county area. However, it did not separate out golf courses.

There are currently two notified SSSI and one identified BHS on Lancashire's golf courses. A grassland BHS on another golf course has been destroyed (in ignorance) by tree-planting.

Lancashire's golf courses support many rare habitats and species.

Current factors affecting the habitat

- Loss of urban greenspace to development due to greater policy emphasis on developing "brownfield" sites
- Over-intensive mowing regimes
- Nutrient enrichment of grasslands and other habitats, particularly through leaving grass cuttings (arisings) where they are cut or disposing of them in semi-natural habitats nearby
- Use of fertilisers and pesticides, particularly in areas where this is not necessary, *e.g.* neighbouring semi-natural habitats. However, in recent years golf course management has advocated the reduction in the use of chemicals as it is often unnecessary and can incur significant costs for relatively little benefit to the course
- Lack of awareness of the value of a variety of semi-natural habitats on the site and how to incorporate their management to benefit biodiversity into current parks and greens management practices. This can in fact reduce costs, improve the aesthetics of urban greenspace and provide greater opportunities for a wider range of biodiversity to exist in urban areas

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- General perception that golf courses should be “tidied” or “gardened”, promoting damaging “over-management”.
- Tree-planting promoted at the expense of other habitats, such as wetlands and unimproved or semi-improved grasslands
- Inappropriate tree species (where tree planting is an appropriate action)

Important Sites

BHS 62SE06 Darwen Golf Course, Tockholes, Blackburn with Darwen Borough; BHS 33SW02 St. Anne’s Old Links Golf Course and Blackpool South Railway Line, Lytham St Annes; BHS 32NW03 The Royal Lytham & St Anne’s Golf Course, Fylde Borough; Silverdale Golf Course SSSI, Lancaster City; Heron’s Reach SSSI, Blackpool Borough

Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy*
 - Planning Policy Guidance note 17: *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* requires local authorities to take account of access to open spaces and areas for recreation within the planning framework. It recognises that “*Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity*”. It also recognises the multi-functionality of open spaces, including as “*havens and habitats for flora and fauna*”, and states that “*sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in local biodiversity action plans*”.
 - Planning Policy Guidance 9: *Nature Conservation* requires local authorities to “*conserve non-statutory sites together with countryside features which provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones, from one habitat to another*”. Golf courses provide a proportion of land that can be useful in maintaining such connections.
 - DTLR publication “*Green Spaces, Better Places*” encourages the consideration of developing diverse green spaces and networks and enhancing existing greenspace to benefit the community and promote urban renewal. (The role of the former DTLR is now divided between ODPM and DEFRA)

- *Site Safeguard*

Silverdale Golf Course has been designated in part as a SSSI for limestone grassland. Several other golf courses are designated in part as Biological Heritage Sites.

- *Land Management*

- The Royal Lytham & St Anne’s Golf Club, Fylde Borough, is acting on recommendations from an ecologist employed by the STRI (Sports Turf Research Institute).

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- Ashton & Lea Golf Course, Preston City, is acting on informal recommendations from The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside following an approach from a club member who is also a member of the Trust.
 - *Advisory*
- The STRI has entered into a partnership with the EGU (English Golf Union) and English Nature to provide a free and independent ecological and environmental advisory service to golf clubs, the aim of which will be to generate a greater awareness and understanding of the contribution that the “out of play” areas on golf courses have on playing the game and on wildlife conservation. A main aim of this service is to provide guidance to enable clubs to develop and improve the habitat and wildlife value of the golf course for both golf and wildlife. The project is initially planned to run from 2002-05.
- Heron’s Reach Golf Course, Blackpool Borough, has recently been formally advised on appropriate management for biodiversity by an ecologist employed by the Sports Turf Research Institute.
 - *Research and Monitoring*

Silverdale Golf Course SSSI is monitored by English Nature to assess that its management is maintaining the characteristic biodiversity for which it is notified.

Public Relations (Initiatives aimed at raising general awareness of the habitat and its conservation)]

A number of publications and websites are available offering information on golf course biodiversity and its management (see below).

Indicators of Habitat Quality

For conservation purposes, a golf course is developing towards favourable condition when:

- “Out-of-play” areas exhibit a range of semi-natural habitats appropriate to the local area,
- The “out-of-play” areas exhibit a graded edge of semi-naturalness (*i.e.* a gradual lessening of management away from the “in-play” areas),
- “Out-of-play” areas are managed to benefit the conservation of biodiversity,
- Consideration of the enhancement of the biodiversity of semi-natural habitats is integrated into overall course management.

Habitat Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
Assess resource of golf courses	Lancashire	Resource assessed by number and area	2008

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Achieve 30% of habitats associated with golf courses in favourable condition by 2010	Lancashire	30% of golf courses favourable biodiversity condition	2012
Raise awareness of the value of golf courses and their contribution to biodiversity	Lancashire		Ongoing

Proposed Actions

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
Research and monitoring				
Establish a definitive database of all golf courses to include estimates of total area to confirm current extent of habitat and location of sites and keep under review (H)	Lancashire	100% of golf courses owners contacted to establish size and location of sites. Database created.	LCC, TWT, NE	2010
Collate existing survey data and conduct survey of relevant sites to establish biodiversity resource (M)	Lancashire	100% of golf courses surveyed to identify biodiversity resource.	LCC, TWT, Local Authorities, GCs	2015
Site safeguard and monitoring				
Work in partnership with Lancashire golf course managers to establish a series of best practice guidelines to	Lancashire	100% Golf course managers trained in management techniques which are beneficial to wildlife. Best practise	LAs, GCs, EGAEU	2015

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ensure work programmes / practices on courses do not unnecessarily affect habitats and species in 'out of play' areas, to the detriment of biodiversity (H)		guidelines identified.		
Habitat protection and management				
Promote and support the English Nature / STRI partnership initiative	Lancashire	Partnership promoted and supported.	LAs, GCs	Ongoing
Ensure all sites covered by statutory and non-statutory designations are assessed for favourable condition and appropriate management undertaken where this is not currently being achieved (H)	Lancashire	100% of sites assessed to establish appropriate management plans.	NE, TWT, BHS Partnership, LCC	2012
Achieve sympathetic management of at least 30% by number of golf courses by 2006 and 100% by 2016	Lancashire	30% 100% of sites managed sympathetically.	NE, TWT, BHS Partnership, LCC	2010 2016
Advisory				
Identify appropriate demonstration sites that exhibit good management practice with a view to biodiversity	Lancashire	Two sites identified for demonstration purposes.	TWT, NE, LCC, Local Authorities	2012

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(M)				
Publicity				
Promote the importance of golf courses in conserving biodiversity, providing green breaks in urban development and providing contact with nature	Lancashire	Leaflet and poster created for use at golf courses.	TWT, NE, Local Authorities, GCs, EGAEU	2010
Carry out one event per year to raise awareness of biodiversity on golf courses		Biannual event established.	TWT, NE, Local Authorities, GCs	2010

Related Action Plans

Lancashire BAP:

Species-rich neutral grassland
 Calcareous grassland
 Broadleaved and mixed woodland
 Rivers
 Song thrush
 Great crested newt
 Water vole
 Bats
 People

References and additional reading

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- (1994) The nature, extent and management of grassland within golf-related Sites of Special Scientific Interest. In: *Grassland management and conservation*. Eds. R.J. Haggard & S. Peel. pp. 240-241. British Grassland Society.
- (1994) The role of management planning and ecological evaluation within the golf course environment. In: *Science and Golf II*. pp. 540-545. Ed. A.J. Cochrane. Spon, London.
- *Living Together: Golf and Nature in Partnership*, English Golf Union. Leicester, 1996.

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Dair, I. & Schofield, J.M. (1990), Nature conservation and the management of golf courses in Great Britain. In: *Science and Golf*. pp. 330-335. Ed. A.J. Cochrane. Spon, London.

European Golf Association (Ecology Unit):

- *An Environmental Strategy for Golf in Europe*, Brussels and Dorking, 1995.
- *The Committed to Green Handbook for golf courses*, Brussels & Dorking, 1997.

Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) – *N.B.* NCC was disintegrated in 1990; contact English Nature.

- (1989) *On Course Conservation: managing golf's natural heritage*, Peterborough.
- (1990) *Your course... Preparing a conservation management plan*. Peterborough.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)

- "*Planning Policy Guidance note 9: Nature Conservation*".
- "*Planning Policy Guidance note 17: Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation*".

Taylor, Bob; Peak, Malcolm; & Penrose, Lee; *The Wildside of Golf*, British & International Golf Greenkeepers' Association; York, (undated).

Web Sites

European Golf Association Ecology Unit: www.golfecology.com;

Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) – Ecology:
<http://www.stri.co.uk/19.asp?SID=&CSID=42>

STRI Ecology Newsletter: <http://www.stri.co.uk/pdf/ecology-newsletter-2003-01.pdf>

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