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Tree Management at Dunfermline Golf Club

Summary Report August 2017

Prepared by Alasdair Hood

**Prepared for John McNeil on behalf of Dunfermline
Golf Club**

Introduction

This report was prepared at the request of John McNeil, Greens Convener at Dunfermline Golf Club.

Tree management is considered to be an integral part of the development of the Golf Course Management Plan and as a result the club wants to develop a five-year ongoing strategy to manage the trees on the course.

This report is an attempt at creating a tree management strategy that will inform and update current and future club managers.

At the outset, it should be accepted that trees are a key asset and therefore have significant financial value and should be managed in a professional manner with a long-term view in mind.

I visited the site on the 3rd August 2017 at 9am on a very wet day with sunny intervals. I met with John and two of his colleagues Kenny and Allan from the green keeping team. I departed the site at 2.30pm after a thorough look round the course and discussions with the above three people.

The discussions were wide ranging and in preparing this summary report I will make general comment about what I found with a few specific points as relevant to particular holes.

It is important to ensure plans are made for tree management well in advance of any works to ensure club managers are able to keep members informed and more importantly gain their confidence.

This report cannot at this stage deal with each hole in detail. This will perhaps be more appropriate in the future.

Findings

The course has been developed on what was a typical park landscape associated with an historic large house - in this case Pitfirrane Castle, a grade A listed building. The Lands of Pitfirrane date back to 1200-1214 during the reign of William the Lion. The original Tower House at Pitfirrane was built by Philip Halkett in the early 1400's. Latterly Sir Charles Halkett produced seven daughters and the Seven Lime trees (now only six) on 3rd Hole represent each daughter. The plantation has been supplemented by the many saplings brought back from each sisters' foreign sojourns.

The golf course has existed on the site since 1954.

On entering through the gateway to the golf course it was clear that the trees were a major feature and asset to the landscape of the course. Some large Limes, Sycamores and Beeches stood out and would have been part of the original landscape.

Initial conversations started with the concerns of the conflicts that arise when ensuring play is balanced with tree management. It was accepted that in managing the trees and the historic nature of the landscape this management must take cognisance of the rules of golf. Aesthetically the trees must give a balance of colour, be in proportion and scale within the landscape, have trees of all ages and above all be managed to reduce the risk to course users.

The trees on the course in general were found to be in good health and growing well. The staff clearly understood the importance of the trees and the need to manage them for the future.

Recommendations

We discussed the need to make sure that there was an uneven distribution of age class throughout the course. The four age classes here would be over mature, mature, semi mature and young. It is important to ensure there is always more young trees than mature as they are the trees of the future.

In discussion, it was agreed that when major works are to be carried out, for example to the bunkers on any specific hole, this would be the time to carry out sympathetic planting and removal works with regard to trees. If three holes were tackled in any one year that would allow for tree management to be done on some cyclic basis every 5/6 years at each hole.

Clearly if there are any safety concerns with regard to trees, work would need to be carried out as appropriate. This could be dealt with by introducing a tree safety policy. Simply this could consist of a walk round the site after any strong wind event to identify any hazards that have arisen such as hanging branches that must be removed immediately.

It was suggested that one key task would be to identify the trees that are likely to make the most significant contribution to the future landscape. These trees would be given a higher management priority. At the same time, it was felt that it would be useful to have a basic count of all the trees on the course. This could be done by volunteers in the first instance.

At the other end of the scale any tree that is deemed to have no future due to poor form, damage, stunted growth or is unsuitable, should be removed sooner rather than later. I say this as it is more economical to do so rather than work round it year after year.

In general, it was found that there were a considerable number of conifers of various types round the course and some such as the Sitka spruce and Leylandii were not lending value to the landscape. Consideration should be given to their removal as part of the long-term management plan. In doing this the desired trees such as Oak will benefit greatly.





7th/3rd Fairway - An example of a tree with no future

At the back of the 2nd hole, which runs along the main road, there is a copse to the west of the main gate which is in poor condition. This area contains two Southern Beech trees, which are not common, but one of them is overhanging the main road and posing a threat. This is an example of where all the older mature trees could be removed and replaced with suitable younger trees. In this case, I would suggest planting a number of Southern Beech to reflect some of the original plantings. Other trees could consist of Lime, Oak, Sycamore or Ash.

Further along there is a superb row of six mature Lime trees. Kenny indicated there were originally seven but one was lost in a storm. The seven trees were planted to reflect the seven sisters from the original owning family. I would suggest, perpetuating this historic fact, a further seven Limes are planted to the east along the boundary.

It was noted that these Limes had been tagged in the past indicating the existence of a previous tree survey (Note: This was last done in 1983 and needs updating).

Between holes 3 and 7 it was noted that the conifers should be felled when time allows.

I recommend where possible that all stumps and roots should be removed rather than ground thus helping to ensure diseases such as honey fungus are not encouraged. This of course is costly and time consuming.



The copse on the boundary by the 2nd hole



The “seven” historic Limes

It was noted on several holes that Dog Wood, a woody shrub, was mass planted many years ago. It is clear in some of these areas that they have out grown their allotted space and in some cases spoiling the trees behind, both physically and aesthetically. I would suggest a programme of removal or severe cutting back should be undertaken.

Although most of the course consists of trees typical to this kind of landscape it may be appropriate to plant more ornamental trees such Himalayan Birch or Paper Bark Maple in small numbers in some locations.



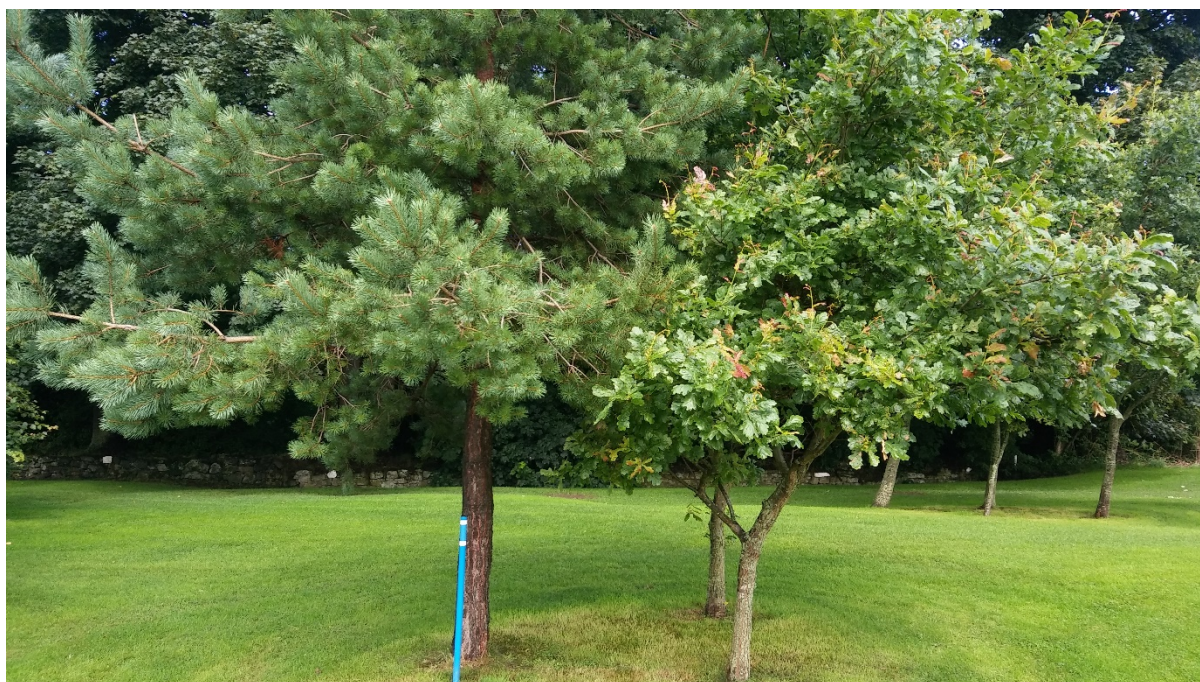
4th Hole - An example of an area that could be visually improved by planting more ornamental trees.

It was noted that there were a number of Larch trees on the course which will give good colour as the season progresses as they are a deciduous conifer. However, a couple were rather close to some of the greens. With needle drop in the autumn this could affect the pH of the soil and consideration should be given to removing these ones. In a similar vein, there were some very large Poplar trees. These are “greedy feeders” with extensive root systems which compete for any moisture. They are also prone to wind damage.

Behind the 9th tee there are several of these Poplars and I would recommend felling them. Half when time allows and the remainder later.

In this same area and in the middle of the copse there is a Whitebeam tree. This was surrounded by some Spruce detracting from the landscape and again I suggest felling the spruce allowing the Whitebeam to fill out. New plantings could also be made.

On the 10th fairway at about the 150-yard mark there was a good example of three trees in close proximity to each other. There is only room for one tree to grow to its full potential thus two should be removed. There are two poplars in this area and they should be removed as well. In fact, there are several examples of small copses, originally planted with several trees to see which ones would survive. Many of these should be thinned or replanted. A perfect example is to the rear east of 11th medal tee where there are three young Oak in need of replanting.



Example of where two trees should be removed

There is a copse at the 10th green/ 11th tee and consideration should be given to its removal and replanting a copse on corner of woods at 10th/11th.

At the rear of 10th green - this area is largely overgrown with dogwood and Elderberry and should be cleared/thinned.

At the 12th tee I suggest the removal of the Spruce and additional evergreens along 12th/5th boundary.

At the 11th tee I suggest removing the conifers over time.

There is a large majestic Sycamore tree at the 12th. This has considerable rot and is likely to be structurally unsound. As it is an important tree in the landscape it should be retained for as long as possible. As it presents a hazard and therefore a risk I would suggest that people movement round this tree is restricted by a small ornamental fence.

I noted a further large Sycamore which is severely hollow. This tree needs to be monitored to ensure any risk is reduced. This could be achieved by pollarding, removing or fencing off.

In the same vein, there was a large Oak which was hollow. This should be managed in the same way.

Evergreens require thinning/removal along 13th/14th boundary.

There are two substantial Sweet Chestnut populations along south side of 14th. The evergreens around the first copse need to be removed to allow for any further canopy growth. The adjacent copse has a two strong specimens and consideration should be made to thin and allow main trees to fully mature.

Consideration should be given to improving the landscape along the hedge line of the 15th hole by planting new trees in a suitable location on the right-hand side.

To the rear of 15th green there is an example of a fallen evergreen which is leaning on and causing damage to a large birch. It has character but consideration should be given for its removal to allow the birch to mature.

Thinning of evergreens is required on 16th south side to allow deciduous trees to mature and there are two examples like 7th fairway example of a tree that is going nowhere.

Copse at 17th tee has a lot of fallen trees and needs to be cleared but is not high priority.

Copse at rear 17th green and 18th medal tee needs all evergreens removed to allow others to mature.

There appears to be a small plantation along 18th fairway which could be extended to include a better diversity of trees from those requiring replanting around the course. Similarly, the 10th/18th fairway north side could accommodate additional young trees from other parts of the course.

18th Fairway and practice ground has a poplar which is almost uprooted. This should be removed as priority permits before it damages the adjacent tree. Replanting oak would be ideal in this position.

PAR 3

With regard to the par 3 course safety of its younger users is paramount and consideration should be given to plantings between fairways. Planting and managing trees to maturity would be long term and costly. The same could be achieved by creating a very informal hedge out of Hawthorn, Sloe and Guelder Rose for example. These would be managed by hedge trimming in order to control their height and to keep them in their allotted space.

Summary

When managing trees, it is important look at the big picture and be aware that a young tree planted today may take at least 20 years to become established in the landscape.

The golf course landscape is of high quality and the staff have maintained and planted trees over the years to a high standard.

However, there are a few unsuitable plantings and if these are managed over time by providing fresh young plantings the landscape will be fit for purpose for decades to come.

This can be achieved by ensuring there is a long term tree management plan.

Alasdair Hood

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