



**GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT LBG**

# **GREENKEEPERS ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

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## Staffing

Despite some unforeseen turnover, 2021 has seen an improvement in the stability and structure of the green keeping staff. We have seen John Greenslade, Mick Peet and Rob Gauvain (mechanic) leave earlier in the year and most recently John Lajoie has resigned. We wish them all well in their future ventures.

The past year saw frequent liaison with Focus, a local HR consultancy and advisory business. Thanks to their advice and support, GCM grows as an inclusive employer and are more coherent to the equal opportunities and diversity requirements expected of a modern-day business.

The appointment of Head Greenkeeper Ollie Pennington at the start of the year has given the team renewed impetus. Ollie has brought with him a wealth of experience having been a green keeper since the tender age of sixteen. Ollie has worked at several courses including St Anne's Old Links, an Open qualifying course and in his home island of Jersey, Ollie worked at La Moye Golf Club and most recently before joining GCM, Ollie was Head Greenkeeper at Les Ormes.

Ollie's deputy, Winnie Savident arrived in November 2020 having come from La Grande Mare. During the 2021 season Winnie's father Martyn (also formally La Grande Mare) followed his son to the northern links. The father and son duo bring a wealth of experience and qualifications to the team; to not only convey on the course, but to also pass down to others.

During the Spring and following the departure of mechanic Rob Gauvain, Kevin Walsh came on board in the essential role of fleet maintenance manager and mechanic. Kevin has a broad knowledge of mechanics and engineering and has proved to a popular member of the team. Whilst not so visible as others, without a serviced, maintained and mechanically fit and healthy fleet of machinery and tools, the green staff could not function.

GCM is pleased to have secured James Falla and Shay Goddard on a 2-year City & Guilds horticulture and sports turf apprentice scheme run by the College of Further Education. James is the son of Royal Guernsey Vice Captain for 2022 Graham Falla and Shay is a close family member of Wayne (Mooro) who was instrumental in recruiting Shay to the team. The level 2

diploma will give James and Shay an excellent understanding of the requirements needed in landscaping, managing and maintaining the differing areas of turf found on the golf course.

Heading into 2022, GCM will invest in staff whenever possible and necessary and will look to develop existing greenkeepers qualifications through recognised and accredited greenkeeping courses. With the support of the GCM Board, Ollie and the team are working towards a five-year plan and with that will be the aim to get L'Ancrese Links in the top 100 golf courses within the British Isles.



**Ollie**  
Head Greenkeeper



**Winnie**  
Deputy Head Greenkeeper



**Kevin**  
Fleet Manager & Mechanic



**Wayne (Mooro)**  
Greenkeeper



**Martin**  
Greenkeeper



**James**  
Apprentice Greenkeeper



**Shay**  
Apprentice Greenkeeper



## Operations Summary

Following a further lockdown and working parallel to the on-going hindrances that the Covid pandemic puts upon us all; this year's immediate priority for the green staff was addressing the many challenges that mother nature and wildlife, threw at the course.

These included heavy rains, grubs and leather jackets, the subsequent damage from crows and seagulls and not to forget the pesky rabbits. A rabbit population that has grown exponentially during 2021.

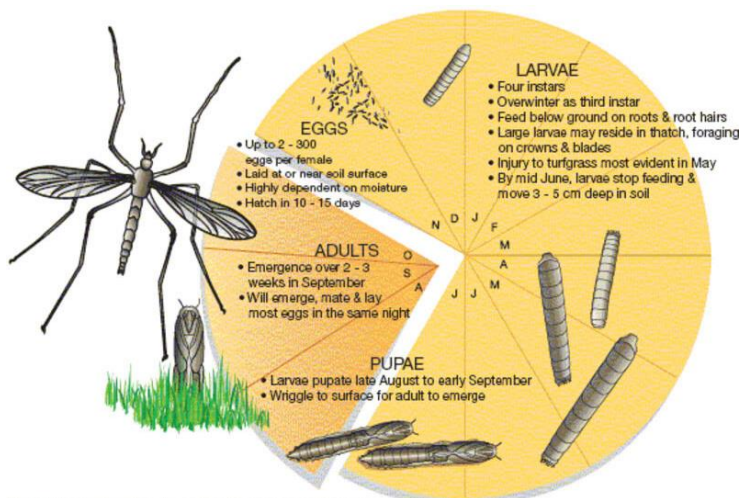


Leading into the early summer, much effort and resource continued with required attention to the greens and approaches. These were very stressful times for Ollie and his team.



*9<sup>th</sup> green - 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021*

There were struggles behind the scenes too. The organic nematodes were not as effective as we had hoped. Efforts and focus switched to the purchasing and acquiring of more effective and invasive pesticides and then secure the licences to store and spray these. After some constructive liaison with several States departments and the Chief Health & Safety Officer, this was achieved.



*Cycle of the Crane Fly that caused much damage to L'Ancrese Links and other courses nationwide in 2021*

Specific licencing was achieved for the storage and handling of the pesticides and off-island training was required to ensure a safe and effective spraying process. The quantity of pesticide purchased has allowed the green staff to spray tee boxes, approaches and most of the fairways too.



*Early morning spraying on the 10<sup>th</sup> fairway*

There is some confidence that these measures will safeguard the course and in particular the greens, from the poor quality of playing surface that was present for several months of 2021.

Not as successful were the steps taken to address the wild rabbit population. Some painstaking and protracted work to apply for and obtain special licence to shoot wild rabbits out of season was unsuccessful. Application was refused by Environment and Infrastructure to shoot rabbits out of season or at night and seemingly unable to see a way through the many laws to grant such permission. In close liaison with Vale Commons Council and the States Vet, work remains on-going for solutions. It is hoped that a reclassification of the wild rabbit from game to a pest may open other options to control the population of wild rabbits as we go into 2022 and beyond.

In the meantime, breaks in the gorse were created to assist the rabbiters who since the start of October, have been out most Saturdays with their dogs and ferrets to net as many rabbits as possible.

In spring, two divot evenings were held with some good support from the memberships.



Whilst it would have been nice to just fill divots, 14 tonnes of seeded soil was required to not only fill divots but the rabbit and crow damage scarring the fairways too. Whilst most of this soil may have been dug up once again, it was deemed a necessary exercise to limit the damage to the course. In 2022, even more soil will be required to keep on top of the worst of the damage and fill increasingly large holes. However, if the rabbit population declines in the next 6 months as we hope, this will not need to be repeated for the years after.

Turning the course around to a more than acceptable standard continues. It is hard to not see the improvements that have occurred in the latter months of the year but given the required management of many hectares of land, there is little time to sit back and admire the work as winter projects and works that were hampered by Covid last winter, become a focus once again.

## **Fleet Summary**

Several years have passed since investment in extending the fleet of machinery has taken place. The GCM Board was advised to purchase a green roller - and this has proved to be an excellent addition to the machinery portfolio.

There will always be a need for consistent green speeds and having the ability to 'iron' greens is vital in producing a better standard of surface to putt on and in competition season, it will help increase the speed of the greens to more challenging levels.



The roller has also brought the benefit of allowing speed and consistency to be maintained during times of stress on the grasses as it negates the need to constantly mow. The rolling of greens will be more common next year with the aim to provide the membership improved putting surfaces and not just for a few months of the year but the whole year through.



Moving around and working over 11,000 square metres of greens and the vast amount of common in a timely fashion, is vital for the green staff. The purchase of two Toro utility buggies has provided the green keepers with swift transport across the links and has cut down on previously wasted time when walking between tasks.



Shay - just waiting on passing his driving test in 2022, then he can drive one

If the standard of the course is to progress in the coming years, investment in up to date machinery and developments in turf management equipment will be required. It is recognised that the fleet of vehicles and machinery represent a considerable investment of funds and this is one reason why we have a dedicated mechanic responsible for maintaining everything from the sharpness of a blade to tractor engines.

To assist Kevin in his role, GCM has purchased a post lift to raise machines off the ground and allow much easier access to the undersides and provide far more efficient servicing of the green keeping fleet. The arrival of this lift has been delayed but we hope to have this ready and working in early 2022.

To address fleet budgets going forward, GCM Operations Manager Phil Sykes has been instrumental in the formation of a local Machine Bank. In simple terms this has involved engagement with local businesses such as sporting bodies and clubs who own, have access to, use or require specialist turf management machinery.

GCM intends to be part of a machine bank pool where the sourcing, servicing and purchasing of turf management machinery, tools and equipment will be a shared venture. This will remove cost duplication and importantly result in a connected stakeholder venture and a collective interest of saving costs.

## Irrigation

The prime function of the irrigation system is to allow survival of the turf in times of relative drought. Without it, the course suffers from turf deuteriation which can take weeks sometimes months to repair and regain. The ability to have a system that can remove and divert flood water away from problem areas back into reserves is also an aim of the intended improvements.



*A sorry looking 1<sup>st</sup> fairway*

The bulk of the current system has been in place for over 35 years. Technology has evolved significantly during this time. Many courses across the UK and in Jersey are now able to boast systems that can be controlled via an App on a greenkeeper's phone. The current irrigation set-up is well past its use-by date and absorbing costs to perform below par irrigation needs.

Regrettably, in 2021, funds have had to be used to address several unforeseen issues with the system that included pipe leaks, electronic pump management and pump house system failures.



*Digging up damaged pipes*



Lighting storms blew sprinkler control panels and decoders across the course and caused the electronic management system to fail and shut down several times. Electricians worked late into many evenings to repair what did look like at one stage, irreversible damage. Thankfully the sticky plaster fixes continue to hold the system together but without investment in a new system, there is no guarantee that the rather limited sprinkler capability will last through 2022.

Unfortunately, and due to Covid, we are over a year behind in securing the services of a preferred irrigation company to install and complete the new irrigation works on the course. Due to delays of getting a preferred contractor to Guernsey, the frustrations in acquiring a modern and technically advanced system have forced a re-group and re-visiting the tendering process once again.

It is inevitable that costs will have increased however Adrian Handbury, who is a highly regarded expert in the surveying of golf courses and the design of irrigation systems, has picked up the baton once again and is due to report back from his inspection and tendering process very soon. Until firm quotes and the availability of contractors and installers to undertake and complete the works is known and financing is guaranteed; firm commitment on commencement dates and level of disruption are not available at this time.

## Consultancy

GCM feels that in reaching out to well-regarded experts, the future of the links as a prime golfing venue will be protected. New and refreshed perspectives can be gained by detailed expert analysis of certain areas of the course, without the need to engage in any managerial advisory contract which can prove costly and not necessarily the best fit for the L'Ancrese Links

Further to the services of irrigation expert Adrian Handbury, other consultancy projects have taken place.

In October, **Sophie Olejnik** who is a leading UK golf course ecologist paid a visit to L'Ancrese and studied the course and surrounding areas in detail. Sophie has advised at several Open Championship links venues and for L'Ancrese Links, will produce a report that will capture a 5-year plan to bring the links back to its former aesthetic glory whilst preserving the biodiversity of the common too.



*file photos*



In November international golf course consultant **Gordon Irvine** walked the course to provide an audit on the condition of the golf course. Gordon will provide ideas, plans and strategies tailored to the needs of L'Ancrese Links. This will help drive projects and improvements that will be a feature to the sustainability of course improvements and the effective management of all manner of resources, for many years to come.



## Looking Ahead

Time does not stand still for the greenkeepers. There are winter projects scheduled but a study and review process of Sophie's and Gordon's reports will steer where the priorities lay.

Mother nature and the anticipated successful spraying of leatherjackets allowing, the marked improvements to the greens and course in general will be maintained and built upon for the 2022 season. Heavy rains and drought conditions are almost a given and these do cause a step back. But it is felt two steps forward are being achieved as the green staff are surely but slowly arriving in a better place to deal with these challenges.

Liaison with the States and authorities to address the population of rabbits and the subsequent damage and health & safety issues they cause, will continue and hopefully resolution will be found in some form and before the Spring sets in.

Smarter ways to maintain the course without interfering with play will be explored. It is frustrating for the green staff as well as the membership to see greenkeepers stood still, waiting for play to go through. Consideration to how the many hours lost by waiting for members to play through the otherwise hard-working green staff, will be considered.

The course cannot cope without top-dressing, sand and fertiliser and due to the specialist requirements of these materials, they have to be sourced from the UK. Over 100 tonnes of sand and top-dressing was used in 2021. Compounded by the pandemic, quotes for these materials for the upcoming season have risen sharply as have the associated delivery costs. Ways and means to stem the flow of these increasing charges will be explored but rarely can these be done without a cost to the course.

There will be some cosmetic changes to the course in 2022. Some of the more noticeable detail will be the ball washers, that are being sent away locally for sand blasting. Sponsorship of markers on the holes, such as tee yardage posts and fairway discs is also being taken forward to raise some revenue and at the same time, promote local businesses. New and improved course furniture such as new flag sticks, flags and hole cups are on order and will be in place for the spring.

Whilst L'Ancrese Links can boast that it is one of the highest number of private members playing the same golf course in the British Isles and has arguably one of the busiest competition diaries of any course too, this does present pressures and challenges to the greenkeepers. The understanding and gratitude shown by many a member to the green staff over recent months has been most welcome and hopefully the appreciation of efforts will continue throughout 2022.



#### **GCM LBG Board of Directors and Support Staff**

Neil Tanguy (Chair) RGGC | Nigel Vaudin RGGC | Robbie Shankland LGC | Chris Thompson RGGC | Jason Savident LGC  
 Phil Sykes (Operations) | Roy Bushby / RGGC (Secretary)