



GOLF COURSE 2030 UPDATE

Resources and what we must consider

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Golf Course 2030 was introduced to develop a roadmap and a programme of research, education and communications for mitigating the impact of climate change, resource constraints and regulation on the condition and playability of our golf courses.

More information on Golf Course 2030 can be found at The R&A website, www.randa.org/en/sustainability/golfcourse2030

As part of the development phase, The R&A commissioned a survey from Sports Marketing Surveys Inc to determine the views of course managers, club managers and PGA professionals in Great Britain and Ireland about these issues, whether their facility has already been impacted by them and their facility's state of readiness to address the challenges they pose.

There were 589 respondents to the survey.

This is the second of three articles that aim to draw out some of the key findings of the questionnaire. The first article focused on climate change, while this one will cover resource constraints.

What do we mean by resource constraints?

Essentially, we are referring to the availability of materials, machinery and the greenkeeping workforce (labour) required to maintain golf courses. The availability of some will be restricted when it comes to golf course use because of competing demands from other sectors.

Water would be an example, with golf probably being considered a lower priority for supply than for consumption by the public, industry and agriculture.

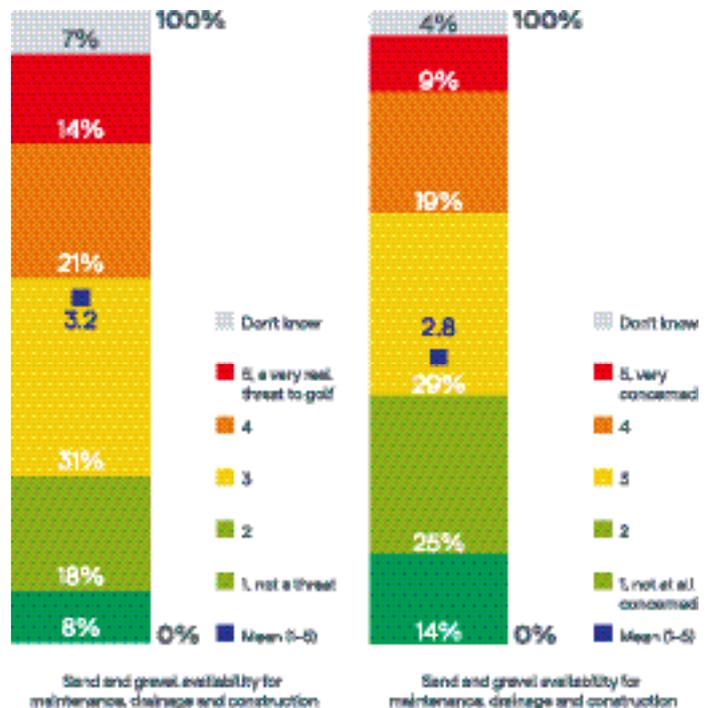
Some resources are finite as the world holds only so much of the material that we can access and use; sand would be a good example of this. Labour availability reflects the

desirability of the greenkeeping as a profession and the profile of greenkeepers in the work place.

The survey asked the

following questions about water, sand and gravel, pesticides and labour:
 / Overall attitude to the issues and how they impact on golf

Figure 1. Perceived threat of issue to golf (left) and the level of concern in relation to own facility (right)



- / Level of concern related to own golf facility
- / Action already taken to address the issues
- / State of readiness to mitigate problems related to the issues.

In this article I will focus on the responses for sand and gravel, and labour, as water and pesticides are also strongly impacted by regulation, which will be the subject of my next article.

GB&I golf facility management professional's views on sand and gravel

This part of the survey focussed on the availability of sand and gravel for the maintenance, drainage and construction of golf courses.

These are essential materials for golf, but some forecasts predict that we only have 30 years' supply left of specific types of sand used in the sports turf industry.

Figure 1 shows the perceived threat to golf and the level of concern for respondents' own facility.

Fewer are concerned about their own business than for golf as a sport. Only 28% expressed a high level of concern, with 39% having no or a very low level of concern.

When responses from greenkeepers are considered in isolation, only 13% were very concerned over the availability of aggregates.

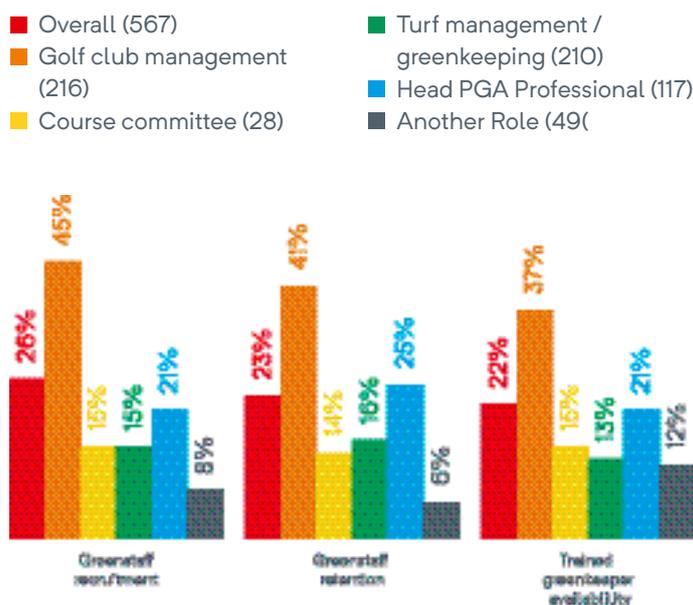
This lack of concern may be related to the fact that there is currently no lack of availability of sand and gravel.

Only 14% of respondents reported that they had already seen an impact, with 86% having no existing experience of this as an issue.

Consequently, the state of readiness to address a lack of availability is also expressed by low scores. 34% are not ready to address the issue, 27% do not think action is required and 13% don't know.

These responses suggest a lack of awareness and a reflection of the short-term

Figure 2. Level of concern over greenstaff issues



nature of golf club management.

Many currently involved in golf course and facility management will not have given too much thought to how we will topdress our greens or fill our bunkers in 30 years' time, but now is the time to give this serious thought so that we are prepared for this scenario.

This is one of the reasons why Golf Course 2030 exists; to make those responsible for managing golf facilities aware of issues that are likely to impact on the condition and playability of our golf courses and to hopefully devise means of mitigating them.

More about that in my fourth article, which will reflect on the research project grant awarded by The R&A.

GB&I golf facility management professional's views on labour

Everywhere I go around the world I am told by greenkeepers' associations and course managers that there is a serious problem in getting people into the profession and retaining those currently working on golf courses. Do the survey responses back up these conversations?

Thirty-three per cent of

respondents have already been impacted by problems in recruiting greenstaff, while 24% reported an existing experience of issues with retention.

The level of concern by role at the golf club is shown in Figure 2.

From this we can see that, not surprisingly, greenkeeping professionals are around 15 to 20% more concerned about greenstaff recruitment, retention and the availability of trained greenkeepers than any other management or decision-making group at golf facilities. Perhaps their professional club management colleagues, committee and board members should be more concerned, particularly as greenkeeping is likely to become more complex and a well-educated and motivated workforce will be more necessary than ever.

What does the survey tell us about attitudes in golf in GB&I to resource constraints?

The survey has provided us and the stakeholders supporting Golf Course 2030 with useful insights into the attitudes of the management team at golf clubs to the resource constraints of sand and gravel and the

greenkeeping workforce.

- / Few are concerned over the availability of sand and gravel. Shortages may not hit us for a decade or two to come, but if we don't start planning for this situation then we may not be ready for it when it happens.

Unlike climate change, as reported in my last Greenkeeper International article, there is divergence in the level of concern over greenstaff recruitment and retention between the club management team. Those working in the greenkeeping profession are far more concerned than the other members of the golf club management team. From what I am hearing, we should all be concerned about the problems of recruiting and retaining greenkeeping staff. Without a body of educated greenkeepers and the numbers able to support them, there is little possibility of sustaining the condition of courses and the playability that is expected today. And who knows what the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be on the greenkeeping workforce and its education?

While many may not currently appreciate it, it is our strong view that the Golf Course 2030 research, education and communication programmes must deliver resilience with regards materials used on the golf course in bunkers, for drainage, construction and topdressing and the greenkeeping workforce.

These issues may not be having an immediate effect on the condition and playability of our golf courses but they will have an impact looking to the medium and long-term if they are not addressed.

My next Golf Course 2030 article in Greenkeeper International will consider the survey results in relation to regulation.