



1914

Dear Member,

Introduction

In 2023, we experienced the highest levels of precipitation in two decades, marking it as the wettest year since 2002 and the third wettest since 1886. This significant increase in rainfall posed considerable challenges for golf courses, including Balmoral, as we struggled to keep the course open as much as possible during the winter months.

Compounded by inadequate preparation for the winter season and a greenkeeping model ill-suited to such conditions, Balmoral faced additional hurdles. Recognizing the urgent need for change, the council, in collaboration with Lee McKenna, our golf professional, initiated a thorough review of the greenkeeping service in November.

Review Findings

During this review, several issues were identified. These included the grass on the fairways and rough being too long. There was an absence of verti-draining throughout the year, which would have better prepared the soil for the winter rain. The flag pins appeared to be problematic; on occasions, they were placed in impossible positions (e.g., the hill at the front of the 11th hole or behind the bunker on a hill on the 8th hole). The greens were not being rolled regularly, possibly due to the rolling machine being out of action and not being fixed. The paths throughout the course were overgrown with weeds. The bins on the course were not being emptied, and the ball washers had no water. The untidy nature of the area around the boot-cleaning area was also an issue. The bunkers were not being maintained and had compacted sand. Additionally, during the summer, it emerged that the greens were covered in excessive wormholes and debris, making them virtually unplayable.

The problem with drainage on the fairways at the front of the course (holes 9, 1, 18, and 10) became evident with the first rainfall of autumn. The drains across the front of the course were blocked and completely compacted, making the course virtually unplayable.

Council Response

In response to the issues identified by the review, the council initiated a comprehensive evaluation of the business model for delivering green services to the golf club. This involved a thorough review of all job descriptions for green staff to ensure alignment with operational needs. Additionally, external contractors were enlisted to address the persistent issue of blocked drains along the front of the course. Notably, the decision was made to streamline the greenkeeping structure by removing the role of the course manager.

Recognizing the need for expert guidance, Balmoral sought the consultancy services of Neil McLaughlin to devise a recovery plan for the course and establish a sustainable maintenance

strategy. Neil's commitment extended beyond mere advisory; he agreed to join Balmoral on a full-time basis for a period to facilitate the restoration of the course to the high standards expected by our members.

The restructuring of the greenkeeping model and the subsequent review of job descriptions prompted some staff to pursue opportunities elsewhere. However, this created vacancies that enabled Balmoral to recruit a fresh cohort of greenkeeping personnel, ensuring continuity and efficiency in maintaining the course's quality standards.

Remedial Actions

Since Neil McLaughlin assumed his role in February, both he and the green staff have been diligently dedicated to preparing the course for the upcoming season. Regrettably, their efforts have been impeded by an unusually high volume of rainfall. Nonetheless, keen-eyed members will likely have observed several notable improvements despite these challenging conditions.

Improvements since February

- Main drains have been cleared by an external contractor and are now flowing well.
- All rough and fairways have been hand-cut with a large pedestrian mower. (see attached image)
- Paths have been sprayed with weed killer, and a sealer has been applied. All paths are currently being resurfaced with stone.
- Pesticides have been applied to tee boxes and greens.
- Storm damage has been tidied up, with trees being lifted where required.
- Repairs have been completed on all bridges.
- Machinery has been serviced and prepared for the upcoming golf season.
- All surrounds of greens have been Verti-groomed.
- Verti-Draining has commenced on several fairways, as well as drum spiking.
- Greens continue to be cut on a regular basis.
- All bunkers are being regularly stirmed and raked.
- Work has commenced on the ball stop fence to the right of the 3rd green.
- Winter mats have been constantly moved and relocated to spread wear and tear.

Plan Recovery of the Golf Course

Course maintenance

Major maintenance areas

Greens

- Height of cut (*summer 3.5 mm*) (*winter 4.5mm*)
- Speed 7.5 April to September
- Speed 8.5 Major competitions

Greens works

- Cutting once per week (winter), (summer) 6 times per week
- Rolling on two occasions per week (summer)
- Verti grooming every two weeks April to September.

Benefits of Verti grooming the greens - An efficient method for removing thatch annually to reduce the accumulation of decaying material that chokes turfgrass.

Does not damage existing grass by cutting into the root zone.

Less labour intensive than removing heavy thatch, instead bringing it to the surface before it gets too thick.

Creates shallow grooves in the lawn ideal for **overseeding** and **fertilizing**.

Thins laterally growing stolon's instead of existing grass, roots, and all.

Promotes upright growth for even mowing and a smoother surface.

Improves oxygen, water, and nutrient uptake resulting in a greener, healthier lawn.

- Topdressing once per month April to September

Topdressing - The process of **putting a thin layer of sand** on the greens is known as "top dressing" and it is done to improve the quality of turf.

- Tining once per month April to September

Benefits of tining greens - Course traffic causes the ground to become compacted. This means drainage is less efficient and the grass's roots are prevented from absorbing oxygen. Hollow tining **allows the compacted turf to expand and air and moisture to be more easily absorbed**. The coring helps address the problem of thatch.

- Fertilizer 270 units per year
- Pest and disease control as required

Tees

- Cutting height 8mm
- Cutting on two occasions per week (summer)
- Cutting once per month (winter)
- Tining once per month (summer/ winter)
- Topdressing once per month (summer)
- Fertilizer 80 units
- Pest and disease control as required

Fairways

- Cutting height 13mm
- Cutting on two occasions per week (summer)
- Cutting once month (winter)
- Verti cutting once per month April to September (thatch control)

Benefits of verti cutting fairways - Verti cutting is the process of using vertical blades to remove thatch buildup on grass. Getting rid of thatch allows the turf to breathe easier and to better absorb important nutrients. Since the layer of thatch can exceed a half-inch, it can eat up the water, air, and nutrients that your turf needs to stay healthy. In addition, the Verti cutting process gives the turf a better opportunity to soak in moisture.

- **Improving soil health:** When thatch is allowed to build up, it can steal away the necessary components of healthy soil (air, water, and nutrients). Using a Verti cutting machine to remove thatch will ultimately lead to more nutrient-rich soil and a healthier lawn.

- **Improving drainage:** A large layer of thatch causes your turf's drainage to suffer. De-thatching your yard is a great way to improve drainage, as water can more easily drain below the surface layers.
- **Creates a better root system:** The process of Verti cutting encourages the grass roots to grow vertically rather than out to the sides. A vertical root system grows deeper into the soil, leading to lusher and stronger grass.
- **Prepares the turf for overseeding:** Another popular tactic for commercial groundskeepers, overseeding creates highly resilient turf. Verti slicing primes the ground to receive the extra seeds.



- Verti draining once per month year round

Benefits of Verti-Draining

Enables the absorption of water from the surface to the drainage system below (if present), preventing run-off and excess surface water

Aids with quick drying of turf to extend playing time

Improves and maintains good soil structure

Improves and maintains sward density giving a better playing surface and preventing the invasion of weeds and moss etc.

Improves the durability of the sward and recovery from surface damage.



- Rolling to firm the surface (summer)
- Top dressing
- Fertilizer every three years

Rough

- Cutting on two occasions per week (summer)
- Cutting height 30mm
- Drum spike
- Cutting once per month (winter)
- Cutting height 25mm (winter)
- Drum spike once per month (winter)

Drainage

- Check all manholes once per year and record.
- Check main manhole once per month.
- Existing course drainage lines to be identified - (photograph in dry period)
- Remove thatch and resurface.
- Verti drain at every opportunity.
- Add to existing drainage system with the use of contractors and in house with the use of our gravel bander machine.
- Use the drum spiker in the rough as well as adding drains were required.

Paths

- Apply herbicide once per year
- Repair manholes
- Top dress in Spring

Trees

- Crown lift in winter
- Use a contractor for major work

In house gravel banding (drainage work)

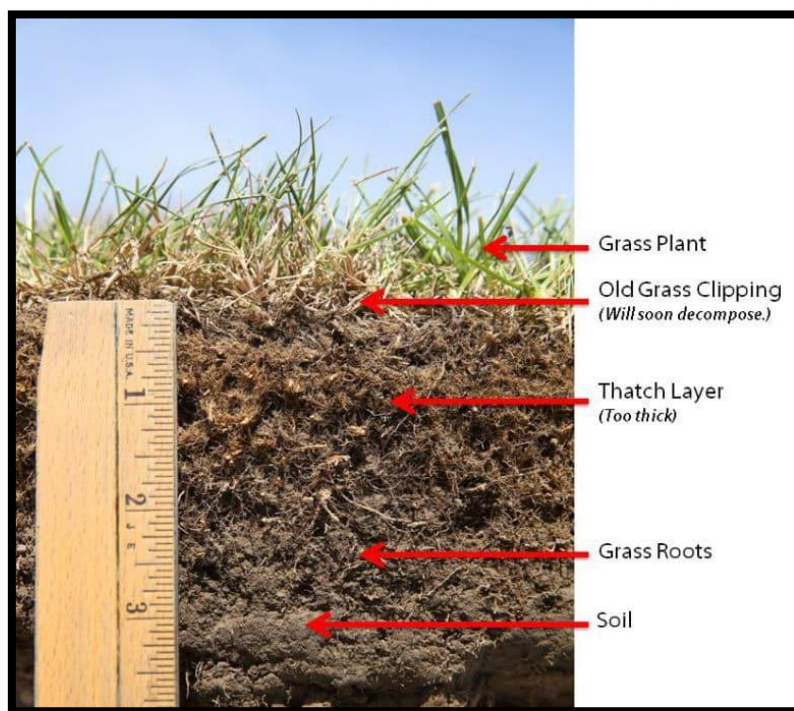
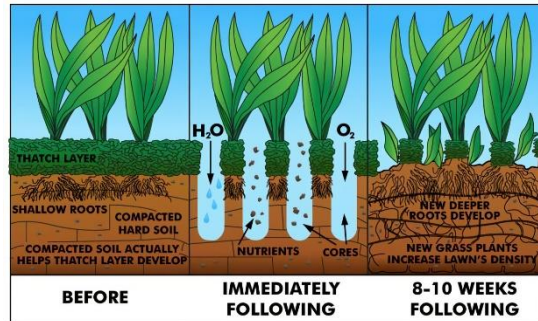
- 100m of gravel banding drains can be cut and filled per hour (estimate)
- Depth of each drain 250mm
- Drains filled with 8mm stone
- There is a plan to gravel band at metre distances on the 15th fairway to the main drains that were installed in 2021.
- Sump drains to be added in areas of our rough.

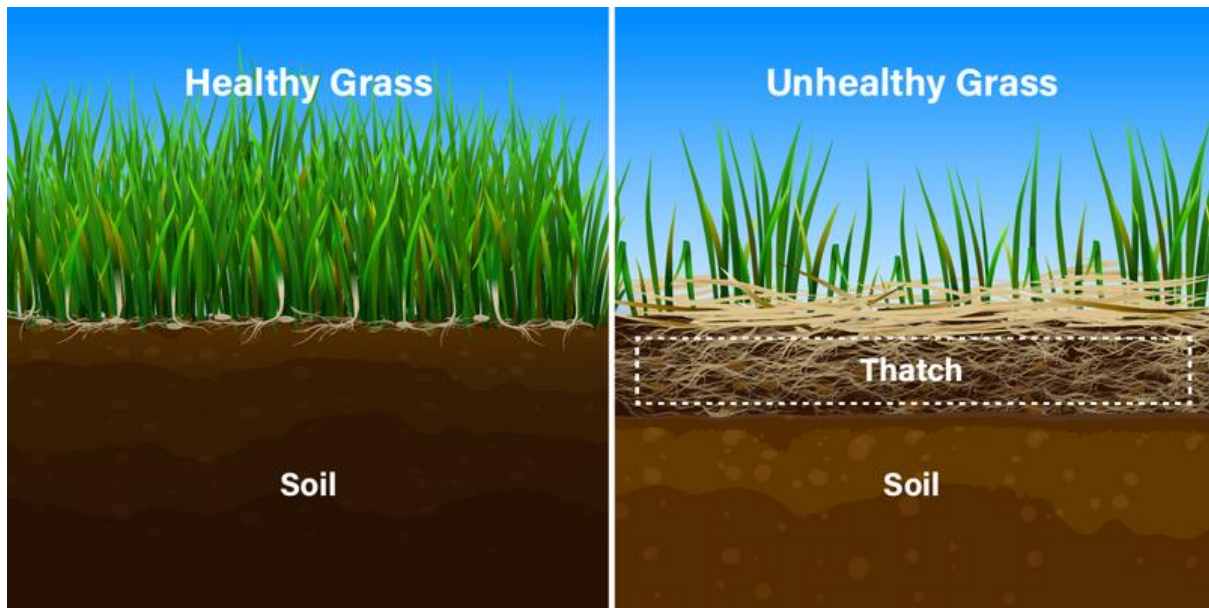


(Image above is similar to our own gravel bander)

Fairway problems

- Thatch layer at the top of our soil (see images below)
- Way to help – Verti draining, verti grooming, new drainage systems and gravel banding.





We will endeavour to continue sending out regular communication an update on the course as and when developments progress.

Kind Regards

Pat Moran
General Manager