

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment and Infrastructure Committee

26 January 2022

North Inch Golf Course Progress Report

Report by Head of Environmental & Consumer Services

(Report No. 22/20)

This report details the North Inch Golf Course Progress Report covering performance against the business plan in the 18-month period from 1 April 2020 to the end of September 2021. It also proposes a new Business Plan for the period 2022-2027.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 In March 2016, Environment Committee approved the North Inch Golf Course business plan (Report No. 16/141 refers). The business plan was developed to deliver service improvements to better meet the demands of its users, while providing best value.
- 1.2 The 6-year plan comes to an end on 31 March 2022 and has helped to transform the performance of the golf course. Over the past 6 years the following improvements have been achieved:
 - the number of annual season ticket holders has increased from 175 to 477 (+173%)
 - the number of rounds of golf played per year has increased from 8,679 to 17,956 (+107%)
 - daily play green fee revenue has increased from £15,976 to £51,652 and season ticket income from £26,230 to £106,586
 - with the addition of footgolf and sales of juice and confectionery, total revenue has increased from £42,206 in 2014/15 to £136,512 in 2020 and a projected £170,000 by the end of this financial year.
 - In the annual survey, overall user satisfaction with North Inch Golf Course has increased from 58% to 87%. See attached infographic (Appendix 1).
- 1.3 The 2016-22 business plan laid out a financial target of reducing the subsidy required from the council to a level of £40,000 per annum. This was calculated in 2016 as the approximate cost to maintain the area of the North Inch Park as amenity grassland if the golf course were not to be there. Applying RPI increase the equivalent figure is now £48,095. The level of subsidy has reduced each year of the business plan from £167,518 in 2014/15 to £60,592 in 2020/21. The projected subsidy in this final year of the business plan has decreased to £47,000

Season 2020/2021

- 1.4 With the first coronavirus lockdown starting on 23 March 2020, that season was put on hold as all facilities had to close under government restrictions. Although closed to the public for play, our greenkeeping staff were able to undertake essential maintenance to ensure the course condition did not deteriorate beyond recovery. Golf was fortunate to be one of the first activities to reopen and did so on 29 May 2020. Since this date the golf course, in common with many other golf courses, experienced a significant increase in participation, with many new people taking up golf and lots of lapsed golfers returning to the sport.
- 1.5 Due to covid restrictions, all volunteer group activities had to be cancelled in 2020, as did the adult 'Get into Golf' beginner coaching programme. Junior coaching sessions were able to resume in a reduced capacity in September and October and these were well received by both the children and their parents/carers.
- 1.6 Due to the increase in participation, the golf course achieved some very positive numbers in 2020. Season ticket numbers increased from 353 to 444 (+25%) and rounds of golf played increased from 12,836 to 17,956 (+40%). Despite only being able to trade for 10 months due to covid restrictions, overall revenue grew from £120,474 to £136,512 (+13%).

Season 2021/2022

- 1.7 The health and wellbeing benefits of playing golf have been much highlighted over the past 18-months and this has led to a continued increase in participation during 2021.
- 1.8 In the first 6-months of this financial year (to end September 2021), the number of annual season ticket holders has increased from 444 to 477, with a full year projection of 490. There were 15,704 rounds of golf played until end September 2021 with a full year projection to March 2022 of 22,000 rounds. For 2021/22 financial year to the end of September, revenue to date was £161,865 with projected full year revenue of £170,000.
- 1.9 The junior coaching programme was able to operate more fully in 2021 and has proven very popular once again. Working with the North Inch Golfers Group, a new 'North Inch Junior Golf Club' was formed in 2021. This is a fully constituted golf club and has been affiliated to the national governing body, Scottish Golf. Over the past 6-years, junior season ticket numbers have grown significantly from just 10, to the current level of 88. Regular weekly coaching sessions from May through September each year, along with Easter and Summer Camps, have helped grow junior numbers. The establishment of the North Inch Junior Golf Club has provided a structured pathway for developing our young golfers beyond the beginner stages of the game, whereby they can gain a handicap and start playing competitions. This helps

keep young golfers engaged with the North Inch and continue their membership.

- 1.10 The 'Get into Golf' programme, which enables novice adults to take up the game, was able to re-start in 2021 and saw 34 people sign up to this category of season ticket and learn to play golf by taking part in regular coaching sessions and playing on the course.
- 1.11 The Council's golf course team comprises a Golf Course Officer, Golf Course Operatives (1 x all year, 1 x seasonal), Head Greenkeeper, 2 additional Greenkeepers and 2 Modern Apprentices. The Apprentices undertake Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 2 in sports turf maintenance through Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Elmwood College in Cupar. The study is undertaken on a block release style with all practical learning taking place in the working environment on the golf course and theoretical learning through the college.
- 1.12 Our full-time golf course starter is being supported in undertaking a 3-year Diploma in Higher Education Professional Golf. This is a partnership between the Professional Golfers Association and the University of Highlands and Islands.
- 1.13 In 2021, the Seasonal Golf Course Operative took on the role whilst also studying towards an MSc Sports Management degree at the University of Stirling. As part of a small team, the operative's role at North Inch has provided hands on experience of running the day-to-day operation of a golf course from operating booking systems and processing season ticket applications to marketing the golf course. In addition, within one week of finishing her role with the council, our seasonal golf course operative was successful in her application for the role of Events Administrator with golf's governing body, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews.
- 1.14 Having experienced significant delays due to the coronavirus pandemic, plans are now progressing for the new golf starters box facility, which is anticipated to be in place during the early part of the new golf season in 2022. However, there have been cost increases in this project, as there have been in most construction sectors at present. Although competitive prices have been sought, this has resulted in a shortfall in funding from the original budget. It has been agreed by the Senior Management Team that additional funding will be allocated from the forecasted service revenue underspend to complete this project.

2. PROPOSALS

New Business Plan 2022-2027

- 2.1 The current business plan comes to an end in March 2022 and a new business plan has been developed to continue the success and maintain the momentum of the previous 6 years. (Appendix 2).

- 2.2 The vision of the new business plan is to continue to create a sustainable future for the North Inch Golf Course. It primarily focuses on retaining and strengthening the relationship with existing users through continuous consultation, ensuring the golf course remains affordable, accessible and enjoyable to play, adding further value to season ticket holders. It also aims to attract new customers by raising awareness of the North Inch Golf Course within the local catchment area and wider market, as well as targeting the Perthshire visitor market. Financially, the business plan aims to keep the level of subsidy required from the Council to that which it would cost to manage as parkland.
- 2.3 The objectives of the business plan are aligned with the those of the Perth and Kinross Offer by working with the user group and the surrounding community to ensure the course thrives and is a source of pride for all. It also ensures that the course is managed on a sustainable basis and is aligned with the Offer workstreams to contribute positively to:
1. Economy – promote Perth and Kinross as a great place to live, work and visit by providing a first class, affordable golf course to play.
 2. Education – develop a Modern Apprentice training programme in the field of sports turf maintenance and horticulture.
 3. Environment – developing non-playing areas within the golf course to promote biodiversity.
 4. Equalities, Empowerment and Fairness – working with local community groups to offer access to play golf for those who may otherwise not be able to do so.
- 2.4 Having successfully increased the membership levels and rounds played, improved the condition of the course and developed new partnerships, further exploration of new income opportunities will now be sought. These could include further development of inter-generational activities such as Foot Golf, Soft Ball Golf and social opportunities afforded by the installation of the new Starters Box.
- 2.5 A new course maintenance and improvement programme will be created, which will be the basis for all works carried out on the golf course. This will help to maintain the high standards of presentation that the golf course has seen over the past 6 years and identify improvements to meet customer needs.

Wellbeing

- 2.6 The North Inch Golf Course influences the physical and mental wellbeing of those using it. Since the golf course reopened at the end of May 2020 following the first lockdown, there has been an increase in the number of community and wellbeing groups who have been in contact requesting access to play golf. They have identified golf as a great way to have a positive impact on their group members and service users. As a community asset, North Inch Golf Course has the opportunity to become sector leading and create

initiatives where playing golf is used as the driver to improve personal wellbeing.

- 2.7 Golf can be played by all ages and abilities together and already has the highest participation level of any UK sport in the over 65 age group. The social interaction associated with golf makes it a champion amongst sports in the combined physical and mental health benefits that can be attained through participation. Recent research by the world's golf governing body, the R&A, identified that 79% of regular golfers feeling loneliness/isolation as a result of the pandemic had a positive impact from playing golf, as did 92% of returning golfers. The business plan aims to further develop partnership working, which has so far led to creating an active volunteer group and to reach out with the successful 'Golf Memories' dementia group.

Biodiversity & Climate Change

- 2.8 The North Inch Golf Course will continue to promote biodiversity within all non-playing areas of the course. This will be expanded by creating further 'No Mow' areas and it has been identified that the surroundings of all teeing areas would make ideal locations for this. A pollinator bed is planned for behind the first green and wildflower areas are to be created between some of the playing areas of the footgolf course. All non-play areas of the footgolf course will become "no mow" areas to help create more diverse habitat.
- 2.9 The new course maintenance programme will increase the frequency of operations such as mechanical aeration and thatch removal, so that chemical inputs can be kept to a minimum. It is also planned that, where possible, repairs and renewals of golf course infrastructure will be carried out 'in house' using locally sourced materials. This was recently achieved on a bridge replacement carried out by the Council's Community Greenspace Infrastructure Squad using locally sourced timber.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 In order to keep Committee informed of progress against the business plan, it was agreed that a regular report be brought before the Committee each year. This progress report for the period April 2020 to end of September 2021 highlights a favourable performance against the Key Performance Indicators in the business plan, including season ticket holder levels, visitor revenue and overall revenue against the financial projections. The current business plan comes to an end in March 2022 and a new 5-year business plan has been developed and is included in Appendix 2. As the North Inch Golf Course development moves into the next stage, the new 5-year plan provides a framework for a sustainable and successful future for the course.
- 3.2 It is therefore recommended that the Committee:
- (i) notes the North Inch Golf Course Progress Report April 2020 to September 2021.
 - (ii) agrees the North Inch Golf Course Business Plan 2022-2027 (Appendix 2).

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	None
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Strategic Environmental Assessment	None
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	Yes
Legal and Governance	None
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

1.1 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

1.2 This report relates to (i) to (v) above by providing a well maintained, accessible and affordable golf facility. Promoting a family centred, healthy lifestyle in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

Corporate Plan

1.3 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life.
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.

- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

1.4 This report relates to (i) to (v) above by providing a well maintained, accessible and affordable golf facility. Promoting a family centred, healthy lifestyle in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

2. Resource Implications

Financial

2.1 There are no operational resource implications arising from the report outwith the existing budget for the North Inch Golf Course. Additional funding for the completion of the Starters Box has been allocated from the forecasted service revenue underspend.

Workforce

2.2 There are no workforce implications arising from the report.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

2.3 The new Starters Box facility would see improved welfare facilities for staff and users.

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups.

3.2 Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allow the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.

3.3 The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in the North Inch Golf Course Progress Report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- Assessed as relevant for the purposes of EqIA, with a positive impact, that retention of the North Inch Golf Course supports affordable play and accessible golf for less mobile golfers, due to the Course's relatively short distance and flat topography.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.4 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its

proposals. The matters presented in this report were considered under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

Sustainability

- 3.5 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions.
- 3.6 The proposals have been assessed in terms of the requirements to manage the Council's Greenspace assets in a sustainable long-term way.

Legal and Governance

- 3.7 The Head of Legal and Governance has been consulted on the content of this report.

Risk

- 3.8 The business plan will be subject to influences from the wider golf market.

4. CONSULTATION

Internal

- 4.1 The Head of Legal Services and the Head of Finance have been consulted on the content of this report.

External

- 4.2 The North Inch Golf Course User group have been consulted.

5. COMMUNICATION

- 5.1 The Progress Report will be communicated to the North Inch Golf Clubs and Users

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 2.1 The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report; (list papers concerned).

- Report to the Environment Committee in March 2016 entitled North Inch Golf Course – Business Plan (Report Number 16/141)
- Report to the Environment and Infrastructure Committee in October 2020 entitled North Inch Golf Course Annual Report 2019-20 (Report Number 20/200)

3. APPENDICES

3.1 Appendix 1: North Inch Golf Course Performance Summary Report

3.2 Appendix 2: North Inch Golf Course Business Plan 2022 - 2027