



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report Golfclub Meerssen

Prepared by Independent Verifier, Paul van Kan

Certified by GEO Foundation: November 2019
Valid until: November 2022

A small facility with an extraordinary community spirit, Golfclub Meerssen is entirely run by committee and an example of what can be achieved with teamwork and focus on maximising natural and social value.

Paul van Kan

GEO accredited Independent Verifier



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Golfclub Meerssen has successfully achieved GEO Certified® status for its outstanding work to foster nature, conserve resources and support the community.

GEO Certified® is the most respected certification for golf, based on a credibly and transparently developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Golfclub Meerssen has:

1. Met the required certification criteria for sustainable golf operations
2. Successfully completed the official third-party verification process
3. Successfully passed the final evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd. (autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation)

GEO agreed with the conclusions of the official verification report, that, having achieved all mandatory criteria; and with specific Continual Improvement Points set for the future, Golfclub Meerssen should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Golfclub Meerssen can therefore claim a position as a leader in advancing sustainability in golf – making important contributions in protecting nature, conserving resources and strengthening communities.

The GEO Certified® Report that follows comments on the actions undertaken against the criteria, as observed by the Independent Verifier during the assurance process.

Certification is nearly always the result of a dedicated team effort resulting in many practical and valuable social and environmental results around the golf course, maintenance facility and clubhouse. These dedication and leadership qualities are an important part of ensuring the resilience of the golf facility and the golf industry into the future and also as part of society's wider effort to pull together for people and planet.

We congratulate all involved.

Jonathan Smith
Founder and Executive Director, GEO Foundation
GEO Certification Ltd. Board Member

Kelli Jerome
Executive Director, GEO Foundation

Richard Allison
Manager, GEO Certified Facilities



Verification and Certification

Verification

The official third-party audit was carried out by an independent verifier, accredited by GEO to undertake verifications of golf facilities applying for certification.

Verification involves reviewing practices and data, using the International Voluntary Standard for Sustainable Golf Operations as the guide to ensure comprehensive and consistent evaluation of performance. A detailed verification report is submitted for evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd, a subsidiary of GEO Foundation.

Certification

GEO Certification Ltd, an autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation [both not-for-profit entities], undertook a full review of all content submitted through the OnCourse® online platform and the report submitted by the verifier, ensuring:

- Comprehensiveness – that activities undertaken touched on all elements of the Standard
- Consistency – that the verification approach was balanced, well weighted and with consistent depth of evaluation across each theme
- Accuracy - matching the verification report with evidence submitted by the golf facility to ensure statements and claims were accurate

GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit founded to advocate, support and reward sustainability in and through golf. Over more than ten years, the group has worked collaboratively with dozens of golf industry associations and government and non-government organisations around the world, to help golf become a sustainability leader, striving for a net positive social and environmental impact. In addition to managing and assuring GEO Certified®, GEO Foundation also provides a suite of credible, practical programmes for golf facility management, new golf developments and golf tournaments called OnCourse®, often delivered in partnership with national golf bodies. Find out more at www.sustainable.golf

Credibility

GEO Certified® is part of the ISEAL Alliance, a group of the world's foremost credible certification systems including Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council and many others. GEO Foundation earned and retains full membership of the ISEAL Alliance global association following a rigorous evaluation against the ISEAL Codes of Credibility in Sustainability Standards and Certification. The ISEAL Codes cover standard-setting, assurance, and monitoring and evaluation. Find out more at www.isealliance.org



Verifier's Report

The Sustainability Agenda for golf covers the following themes and action areas:

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Habitats & Biodiversity• Turfgrass management• Pollution prevention
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water• Energy• Materials
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships & Outreach• Golfing & Employment• Advocacy & Communications

Included below are the observations made by the Independent Verifier against each item in the Standard.

NATURE			
N1 Habitats and Biodiversity			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
N1.1 Understand the site and surroundings	N1.1.1 Sound understanding of the nature and landscape value of the site	(Course management) Map all habitats and vegetation types on the site; Regularly update landscape / biodiversity	Quick scan on nature values (2018) provides a good view of the protected species present; Planting plan (map) also can be used for habitats

		surveys	<p>CIP Investigate biodiversity every 3 years, together with members and with the help of the local nature club (NHG, Vogelwerkgroep, IVN).</p> <p>CIP Make habitat map based on the vision and target image for whole golf course</p>
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	<p>(Course management) Understand legal responsibilities for protected landscapes and species; Record and monitor protected, endangered, or rare species found on the site</p>	<p>According to the report 'implementation of the Nature Protection Act 2018', badger, buzzard and amphibians (reproduction in a pond) are the most characteristic, protected species; Bats are foraging here, but there are no cavities; The edge of the forest is part of the NNN (national nature network) and access is prohibited (agreed with the provincial authorities); Electric fence is meant to stop wild boar, badger and other mammals will not be hindered</p> <p>CIP Inventory frequently protected species</p> <p>CIP Code of conduct with management guidelines and annual planning is required to protect vulnerable species and vulnerable sites</p>
	N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	<p>(Course management) Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site</p>	<p>The golf course is located between village and hillside woodland, on former fields and orchards, belonging to the monastery 'Overbundhof'</p> <p>CIP By planting fruit trees and hedges, the identity is strengthened and the ecological values are increased as well</p>
	N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the course	<p>N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass</p>	<p>(Course / club management) Observe, track and / or monitor golfer play</p> <p>Space for nature between the holes is very limited on this small compact course of only 7ha; Most promising are the forest edge and the aquatic biotopes (great richness of herpetofauna in nearby N2000 area Bunder- and Elsloërbos);</p> <p>CIP Small corners and narrow edges on the outside borders are worth a lot if designed and managed to increase ecological values</p> <p>CIP The high quality of the spring water and small pond can be further developed for increasing biodiversity; Natural mineral montmorillonite can be used to make watertight (attention to reed and other aquatic plants with strong roots)</p>

N1.3 Actively manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	(Course management) Regularly review and follow a habitat management plan; Prioritise native species when planting and landscaping	<p>Volunteer group (about 20 people) directed by the course committee maintains all forested sections, trees, hedges, shrubs (an aging population makes it probably necessary to take over by the greenkeeper on the basis of a multi-annual maintenance plan); VTA (Visual Tree Assessment) available, high-risk trees will be removed (and replaced).</p> <p>CIP Make an annual plan for nature management based on the nature calendar, combined with habitat map and code of conduct</p>
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species		<p>Combination of hillside forest and spring water results in characteristic species</p> <p>CIP Place nesting boxes for characteristic species of orchards and wooded ridges in cooperation with the 'Vogelwerkgroep Margraten' (e.g. little owl, white wagtail, common redstart, starling, house sparrow); also a bat pile will be very successful in this area</p>
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turf and soil health	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors	(Course management) Select appropriate grass species for climate	<p>Greens consists of agrostis (resistant to short cuts of 4 mm) and 40% of poa annua; the aim is to achieve an annual 5% reduction in the amount of poa annua obtained by re-sowing, ventilation, sanding and well dosed sprinkling;</p> <p>Fairways consists of festuca and lolium</p>
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		<p>Golfclub Meerssen is well aware of the features of the soil and water system;</p> <p>Due to the increased risk of erosion, gratings are provided on frequently used slopes (buggies are not used)</p>
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	(Course management) Soil tests and nutrient analysis	<p>Sound external guidance on course management has been established;</p> <p>Fertilizing is done both organic as well as inorganic and in low amounts;</p> <p>Fairway is fertilized once a year</p>
N2.2 Prioritise	N2.2.1 Non-chemical	(Course management) Sharpen mowing	Manual maintenance to keep grass in good condition is mentioned in an

cultural management	pest, disease and weed management	blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	external advice and chemicals replaced already
N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	(Course management) Establish patterns and levels of risk for pests and diseases; Scout the course daily for early signs of pests and disease; Accurate pest and disease identification; Map and track pest and disease hotspots; Establish pest and disease thresholds	Use of chemical plant protection is very limited (greens herbicide 1x/year herbicide, fairways fungicide 1x/year) with authorised products (tapir and signum)
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	(Course management) Use only legally registered and approved products; Ensure staff are fully qualified and licenced to use pesticides; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Use appropriate protective equipment; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of turf	Pesticides are controlled and stored centrally at the (certified) contractor, not on course; the use of pesticides is negligible
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from golf course operations	(Course management) Document procedures for emergency spill responses; Maintain mowing buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Maintain spraying and spreading buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Create a map / aerial visual reproduction, drawing etc of the course showing buffer zones and no-spray, no-spread areas.	Synthetic lubricants are used; protection areas around water and spring streams width 2 m
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	(Club management) Ensure all hazardous materials are safely and securely stored; Ensure compliance with all required standards and systems for hazardous waste and waste water discharge	Security plan is provided; There is no kitchen, so grease separators are not necessary
	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	(Course management) Ensure wash areas are on impermeable, leak-free surfaces; Mixing and loading of pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	Security plan is provided; petrol jerrycans are placed in PVC drip tray; Most of the own machines are electric and therefore have a low environmental risk; Refuelling and maintenance are done at the contractor, so not on the course; Machines are cleaned with air after use

N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances	(Course management) Maintain a register of hazardous materials available to authorised staff; Safe storage in secure and ventilated concrete or metal building; Sufficient storage capacity; Impermeable flooring; Spill containment kits present; Emergency wash area; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area; Secondary containment for fuel, either externally constructed, or integrally manufactured; Regular inspection of storage tanks	There is a very limited supply of fuel because mainly electrical machines on site, other machines centrally at the contractor (Once every 2 weeks, machines are moved to the contractor's central workshop for cleaning and refuelling); Storage of pesticides and fertilisers, refuelling and maintenance is carried out centrally, at the contractor, so not on the course
N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	N3.3.1 Appropriate waste water usage and discharge licences	(Course management) Waste water discharge licence; Appropriate treatment of machinery wash water (impermeable surface, oil / grease / clipping separation)	Drainage of the clubhouse is connected to the public sewage system CIP Disconnect the roof water and bring it to a storage case to return to the ground water

RESOURCES			
R1 Water			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
R1.1 Minimise water demand	R1.1.1 Measures to reduce the need to consume water	(Course management) Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces only	Groundwater is pumped up from a depth of 55 m and is only measurable from 2018 onwards; Water consumption is exceptionally low and can hardly be reduced; Adjacent groundwater protection area (without special consequences); Wetting agents are used on greens
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course	(Course management) Conduct regular irrigation performance checks; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices; Ensure effective application of water to	Only greens/foregreens are sprinkled, tees consists of mats, fairways may turn yellow (total irrigated area maximum 2.3 hectares); Irrigation is determined very precisely on the basis of soil moisture, weather and evaporation data, which are translated daily into the amount of irrigation via computer settings;

		target areas; Ensure irrigation schedules are informed by weather patterns and soil moisture analysis	If necessary, manual adjustments can be made, e.g. in the event of a severe drought
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	(Club management) Audit water use regularly; Review bills frequently and look for irregularities; Encourage water-saving practices amongst staff and visitors; Categorise and track water consumption	Only from 2019 an own meter is available (until then it was shared with the neighbour sportclubs); Tap water consumption is very low, partly due to the absence of dressing rooms and showers; Dishwasher (purchased 2017) considered sufficient, given the current use CIP Install saving buttons on sanitary facilities
R1.3 Source water responsibly	R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water	(Course / club management) Ensure appropriate water abstraction permit and reporting, as required	Already very little groundwater is extracted and there is no possibility to store own water CIP Study the disconnection of roof water from the sewer, so that the sewer is not overloaded during rainstorms and groundwater is replenished
R2 Energy			
R2.1 Reduce energy demand	R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in course maintenance	(Course management) Minimise areas of managed turf to reduce mowing, irrigation, and turf inputs	Maintenance report (2018) is a guideline on this point; Restrictive use of fertilizer and moisture limits grass growth and hence the frequency of cutting
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	(Club management) Audit energy use regularly; Regularly review bills; Categorise and track energy consumption	The sustainability scan (2016) provides guidance; Pellet stove was considered but has disadvantages so that for the time being the building is heated with natural gas; It is preferable to use insulation of roof and windows (already done); Thermostats and central heating are set up more economically; In 2017 all lighting is replaced by LED (interior and the limited exterior lighting as well); Locker room equipped with timer. CIP Install timers also in other sparse used spaces
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms	(Club management) Determine potential sources of renewable	The club uses green electricity and is supplying at least 50% of its own electricity since 2017

	of energy	energy in the area and on-site, through renewable energy providers	
R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives	(Club management) Undertake a review of materials consumed	Less plastic packing by consciously changing to glass, which means that already 40% of the waste consists of recyclable glass
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	R3.2.1 Practical use of an ethical / environmental purchasing policy	(Club management) Adopt a sustainable, or ethical / environmental purchasing policy to maximise the use of locally sourced goods and goods made from recycled, recyclable and certified materials	Guidelines from 'product management and purchasing conditions' (expected by the end of 2019) are already being put into practice; Number of deliveries is very limited and combined (catering and contractor both local); Local supplier once a week; Beer is local and organic CIP Gradually change to organic (and fair trade) products, starting with coffee, tea and dairy products. CIP Despite previous attempts, try to organise purchases centrally with other sports clubs in the complex
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity	(Club management) Demonstrate waste separation, reuse and recycling; Track how much waste goes to landfill, or is reused / recycled	Summary of waste available for 2018; Recycling is a monthly theme in meetings of volunteers; Currently over 50% is recycled yet; Empty bottles are returned to the supplier, at the same time as delivery; Plastic is replaced by glass, with which glass determines 40% of the waste stream, whereas paper makes 10%; Residual waste on course is collected in buckets at each hole CIP Change to central collection (so take garbage with you) which makes separation possible; this can be set as a special moment that inspires the other sport clubs at Heiveld

R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations	(Club management) Use authorised waste and recycling contractor for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste;	Waste is collected and disposed by a qualified waste processing company; Pruning waste 1x/ year external; Cuttings are stored on a 10 cm layer of wood chippings and are regularly removed, including chippings
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COMMUNITY			
C1 Outreach			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Diversify access and provide multi-functionality	C1.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility		The golf course is far too small for other forms of recreation, but is part of a recreation complex near the village of Meerssen; Clubhouse with very limited catering must remain secluded by local law, but is in use for other recreative activities
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes		Golfclub Meerssen is a 100% voluntary club with strong internal cohesion; greenkeeping, restaurant and organisation of tournaments are under one of the 8 committees whose tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined in 'charters'
C1.3 Establish active community partnerships	C1.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups	(Club management) Create a 'sustainability working group'	The club is particularly pro-active in their contacts, such as the agreements on the management of the forest edge under NNN (an annual check with the provincial authorities is held on own initiative); This also applies to the contact with the municipal government and civil service twice a year; Regular contact with the Heiveld sport clubs, Stichting Duurzaam Meerssen and the adjacent butterfly garden
C2 Golfers & Employees			
C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health		Safety receives careful attention, as shown by the contingency plan and the

	from golf and facility activities		<p>recording of incidents;</p> <p>Members are aware of the contingency plan via digital newsletter and the availability for inspection in the clubhouse;</p> <p>Thunderstorm instructions are both clear and secure;</p> <p>During the season, non-competitive 9-hole competitions for trial members and the elderly are organized on a weekly basis</p>
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	(Club management) Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	<p>Low-threshold open day is held every year;</p> <p>Local companies can purchase a business membership in combination with sponsorship;</p> <p>A large display in the club house provides various information to members and visitors, such as the proceeds of the solar panels</p>
C2.3 Employ fairly and safely, and provide career opportunities	C2.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development	(Club management) Follow all relevant national legislation and best practice for employment, health & safety etc	<p>The club runs entirely on volunteers, with the exception of the two part-time jobs on greenkeeping by a certified company with fixed working conditions;</p> <p>Volunteers receive training adapted to their tasks and new members are also well supported in their expected contribution to the club</p>
C3 Communications			
C3.1 Engage golfers and members	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors	(Club management) Provide information on the facility's sustainability commitments, actions, or achievements	<p>2016 the club adopted sustainable golf and since then communicates regularly with the members via the newsletter @fore (22 x/year) and the GMM;</p> <p>2020, the long-term vision will be adopted, with maximum involvement of members;</p> <p>Work plan and actions are evaluated annually and actions are planned together with the greenkeeper and volunteers</p> <p>CIP Make a simple communication plan with the publicity committee as the driving force and GEO as a recurring theme</p>
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community	(Club management) Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement	<p>Golfclub Meerssen is strongly focused on 'doing' and is an example to the local community, such as the other clubs of Heiveld and the municipality;</p> <p>The community is invited at crucial moments, such as the installation of the solar roof;</p> <p>during the annual open day, attention is paid to flora and fauna</p> <p>CIP Join the national Bird Watching Day</p>

			<p>CIP</p> <p>Add information on GEO, sustainability and nature to the website</p>
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Golf and Sustainability

Among all sports, golf has a particularly close relationship with the environment and communities, golf facilities can bring many benefits to people and nature - from the protection of greenspace and conservation of biodiversity; healthy recreation for all ages; local supply chains; and jobs, tourism and other forms of economic value.

Adopting a more sustainable approach is also good for golf. It's about presenting a high-quality golf course and providing a memorable experience in natural surroundings. It's about being as efficient as possible. And it's about supporting the community in a range of ways that bring increased recognition, respect and contact.

At a broader level, it's important that golf credibly demonstrates its commitment, and its social and environmental value – strengthening the sport's image and reputation for the long term.

Golf facilities that participate in OnCourse®, an international sustainability initiative assured by the non-profit GEO Foundation, are taking a comprehensive approach and striving to be leaders in the community.

Find out more at www.sustainable.golf