



GOLF

SOUTH AYRSHIRE

GOLF STRATEGY UPDATE

2024/25

INTRODUCTION

In March 2021, Leadership Panel agreed to establish a short-term Member/ Officer Working Group (MOWG) to consider the Council's proposed Golf Strategy. Four Councillors were appointed to this group on a cross-party basis. Leadership Panel were provided with a set of objectives to be considered and developed by the MOWG and these were endorsed through the MOWG at its first meeting. These were:

- Investment in course maintenance and improvement.
- Future operating model for golf.
- Golf pricing structure.
- Partnership arrangements between golf clubs and the Council.
- Rights of access to golf courses; and
- Environmental sustainability.

The MOWG discussed a range of operational issues in relation to these objectives, the potential future use of and investment in each of the courses was considered at a high level and consensus was reached on the potential way forward.

Subsequently at a Full Council meeting in December 2021, the 10-year Golf Strategy was approved with the request that an update on progress be provided on annual basis. This is the third annual report.

Our Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives have been identified to deliver the Golf Strategy in South Ayrshire 2022-2032:

1. Achieve Golfing Excellence

- Provide golf courses with a year-round playing experience that is equal to, or better than, any comparable course in the region.
- Establish a high-quality development programme and practice facilities which support all standards of golfers and to increase participation, particularly by female golfers, families, and young people.
- Invest in golf courses to ensure they are compliant with modern safety standards, reflect advances in technology and meet the needs of members, visitors, and other users.

2. Evaluate and Remove Obstacles

- Establish a membership fee structure which supports inclusive golf.
- Establish a comprehensive and professional internal and external communications programme to raise the profile and reputation of Golf in South Ayrshire.

3. Create the Environment

- Ensure a warm, friendly, and welcoming environment for all members and visitors.
- Continue to invest in non-course assets to ensure that they are secure, maintained and developed to a high standard.
- Provide a consistent, high quality and cost-effective bar and catering service which supports both golfing and non-golfing activities.

4. Health and Wellbeing

- Establish a comprehensive programme to maximise the benefits of golf for all.
- Provide ease of access, year-round, for all.

5. Environmental Sustainability

- Ensure best greenkeeping practices and the latest techniques are used to maintain the courses.
- Achieve recognised environmental accreditation.
- Identify potential sources of green energy and income generation.
- Protect the courses from the effects of climate change.
- Ensure all working practices and facilities are compliant with current regulations.
- Meet or exceed reductions in annual carbon budgets to support the achievement of the Council's Net Zero ambitions by 2030.

6. Management Control

- Establish a sustainable and business aware management operation that guides the long-term ambitions of golf in South Ayrshire.
- Ensure that best practice governance sits at the core of decision making.
- Improve financial performance and planning through cost control, implementation of efficiency savings, and maximise opportunities to increase income generation.

These strategic objectives will be delivered across nine functional areas.

I. THE COURSES

In August 2022, Golf Course Architects, KimberGlen, were appointed through a procurement exercise, to undertake a comprehensive appraisal of six Golf South Ayrshire courses. Belleisle and Darley Golf Courses had previously been appraised in 2018 and 2020 respectively, also by KimberGlen.

The appraisals considered all aspects of the golf courses including:

- Course layout
- Enhance playability and reputation.
- Health and Safety
- Resilience to climate change
- Reduce long-term operational/maintenance costs.

Options for the possible redevelopment of courses were also included, which would assist South Ayrshire Council to achieve the agreed Strategic Outcomes and increase income opportunities from visitor and members.

Based on the initial recommendations made by KimberGlen, it was proposed that the two priority courses for investment should be Darley and Belleisle.

Options for the redevelopment of the remaining courses should be considered if further investment were to become available.

The ongoing investment is required to ensure that the condition/reputation of the golf courses does not deteriorate and subsequently impact playability and impacting visitor and member income.

Golf South Ayrshire continues to engage with specialist agronomists when required to undertake an agronomical assessment of the golf courses. These reviews provide a scientific insight into the turf and environmental conditions, as well as reviewing current maintenance practices which enables the Greenkeeping team to make informed decisions and adapt the agreed course maintenance plans if required.

In December 2021, initial funding of £500,000 from uncommitted reserves was approved to improve course condition, address health and safety issues and drainage challenges on the golf courses.

These funds, following a successful procurement process was allocated to three priority on-course projects:

1. Darley Safer Walking Routes (additional funding of £100,000 from Place Making Grant was awarded).
2. Belleisle & Seafield Drainage Improvement (additional funding of £140,000 was awarded from NatureScot Nature Restoration Fund).
3. Lochgreen 2nd & 3rd (including Fullarton 8th, 14th and 15th holes) Drainage Improvement.

Projects 1 & 2 were completed in July 2023, and Project 3 construction phase was completed in January 2024.

Capital funding (£5M) to redevelop Belleisle and Darley Golf Courses was approved by Council in March 2023.

Preliminary Ecological Assessments were undertaken at both locations in September 2023, and were used to inform SAC of any additional wildlife / habitat surveys that may be required to satisfy any necessary planning requirements.

Golf South Ayrshire registered to 'On Course', an online portal for recording and tracking data pertaining to Golf Course Operations. Once sufficient data in 3 key areas of operation: Nature, Resources and Community, has been provided it will then be possible to apply to be assessed and if successful, be awarded Golf Environmental Organisation (GEO) Certified Status.

Golf Course Maintenance documents for all courses have been introduced which clearly sets out the services ambitions to refine day to day activities on the courses, improve turf quality and support the service's application for GEO Certification.

A new fleet of golf course maintenance equipment has been purchased for Troon Links, Belleisle Park and Northfield Bowling Centre including new hybrid and electric machinery which will assist the service in achieving its Carbon Budget responsibilities as well as providing the service with additional efficiency savings and improved course presentation.

PROGRESS SINCE DECEMBER 2023

Course improvements:

I. Lochgreen 2nd & 3rd (including Fullarton 8th, 14th, and 15th holes) Drainage Improvement

The holes reopened following a challenging grow-in period in August 2024, and have generally been well received, the regular issues with flooding on these areas of the courses has drastically improved and will remain under observation to ensure all infrastructure continues to operate as designed.



Figure 1: Lochgreen 2nd Hole before construction.



Figure 2 Reprofiled Fairway during construction





Figure 3 New 2nd Green and Drainage Ditches

Capital funding (£5M) to redevelop Belleisle and Darley Golf Courses was approved by Council in March 2023. The necessary follow-up Ecological Assessments have been completed at both sites during September 2024, and will be used to inform the appointed Golf Course Architect (Pangaea) when collating the relevant proposals for the above courses.

Further Capital Funding of £1.3M was allocated to develop enhanced practice facilities to replace the existing practice area at Belleisle which was assessed to be unsafe by KimberGlen during their course appraisal in 2018 and highlighted during the development of the current Masterplan for Belleisle by Pangaea Golf Architecture.

Public engagement sessions pertaining to the proposals for Belleisle Golf Course were undertaken in October 2024. The initial design concepts for improvements to Belleisle Golf Course were on display at Belleisle Club House during the month of October. A total of 244 comments were received by attendees gathered during the public engagement sessions and via the online form. This feedback is currently being reviewed by Pangaea Golf Architecture, and they are giving consideration on whether this feedback can be incorporated in to the initial proposals. Once the review is complete, we will provide clubs and customers with a revised programme of works and updated MasterPlan.

As part of the ongoing process and following the recent public engagement at Belleisle Golf Course, South Ayrshire Council has invited proposals from Alliance Leisure Services (ALS) to undertake a comprehensive review of the proposed Golf Development Centre at Belleisle Golf Course. The review will also give due consideration to the wider South Ayrshire Golf Strategy and align this feasibility with the overall strategy.

It is anticipated that the public engagement sessions pertaining to the proposed redevelopment for Darley Golf Course will be undertaken during March 2025. Again, any feedback received during the engagement period will be considered by the Golf Architect.

The new fleet of golf course maintenance equipment has now been delivered for Troon Links, Belleisle Park and Northfield Bowling Centre including new hybrid machinery which will assist the service in reducing fuel usage and subsequently reducing carbon emissions.

2. MEMBERSHIPS

Following a significant upturn of popularity in the game over the past 2-3 years, season ticket sales have continued to remain strong. Demand for tee times at both Troon Links and Belleisle Park courses continues to be very high and following a change in booking procedures (prioritising online booking) tee time utilisation has significantly improved.

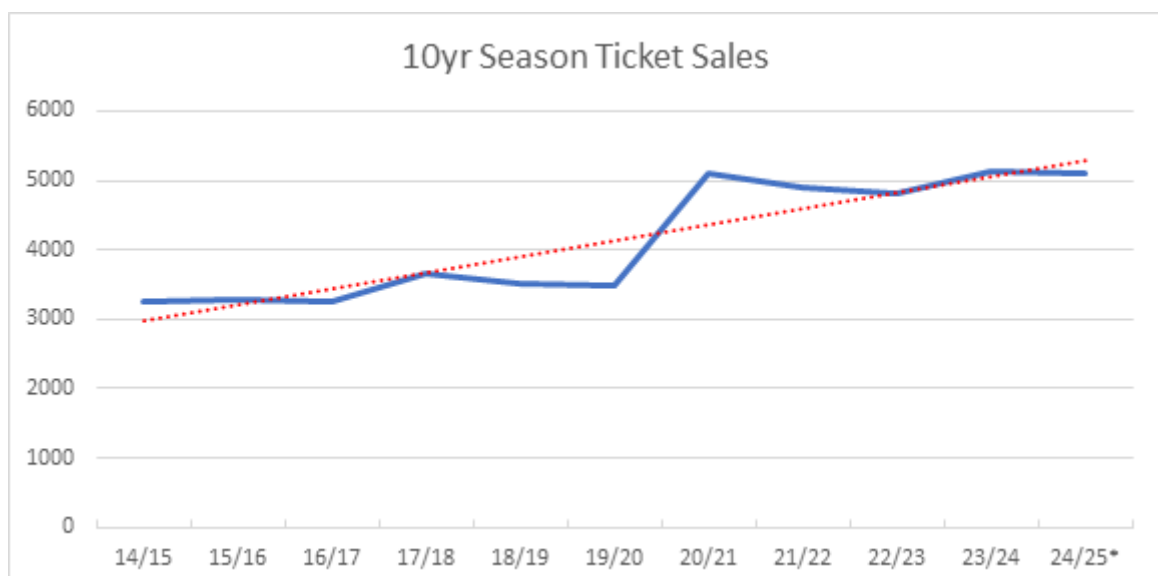
A new Golf Concession Scheme was introduced as part of the 23/24 Season Ticket renewal with a revision of discounts and new categories, which simplified eligibility. The impact of the revised scheme has continued to be positive for the service during the 24/25 season.

Golf South Ayrshire has been in discussions with the National Governing body, Scottish Golf and local area and county representatives with regards to improving the relationship between the service and Golf Clubs with playing rights to play on the public courses.

Discussions have been positive with an understanding and agreement that Inclusion, Equality and encouraging Participation from under-represented demographics should be central to the future agreements. Work is ongoing in relation to affiliated golf clubs who have permission to play on the courses. Engagement with clubs commenced during 2023-24 and is planned to be implemented in season 2025-26.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024

Golf Membership Sales have remained well in excess of pre-pandemic sales, and continues to follow an upward trend, with the total number of season tickets live at the end of December 2024 at 5100.



The sale of traditional annual memberships was capped in August 2024 due to reaching capacity; however, sales of FLEXI-Memberships have continued.

We are currently working with each of the 27 golf clubs to agree a partnership agreement ensuring their club constitutions include references to the equality act and safeguarding, which will enable GSA to establish robust pathways for participation.

The Golf South Ayrshire Golf Club is the first affiliated club to achieve Scottish Golf's 'Safegolf' Accreditation.

GetintoGolf memberships for new or returning golfers have continued to be immensely popular, 82 golfers are currently engaged with this programme.

3. MARKETING

Further work on a marketing plan is currently being developed with a renewed focus and recognition that Golf is a main tourism driver for the region.

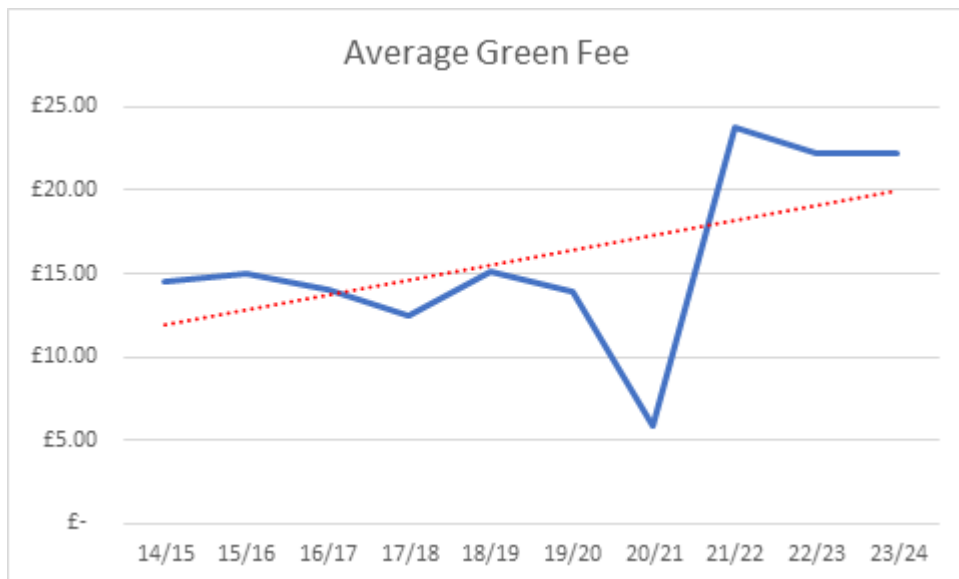
The tour operator and hoteliers' scheme will be relaunched, and the region was represented at Bunkered Live at the NEC, Birmingham and the Scottish Golf Tourism event held in St Andrews early in 2024.

The current Golf South Ayrshire website is over 7 years old. It is the intention of the service to replace the current website to improve its internet presence using several techniques including professionally created video footage of the courses and improved photography to demonstrate how attractive the courses are with the intention of increasing the number of visitors to the area.

Tour Operators and Hoteliers Scheme was relaunched in April 2024 to coincide with the return of The Open to Troon in July 2024.

The service engaged with a specialist Golf Photographer who completed several visits to the courses unaffected by the construction works. These images will be used in all new marketing campaigns and the refreshed website.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024



Despite Lochgreen being unavailable for the whole month of July 2024, The Open being held in Troon had significantly positive impact on Visitors playing the courses. YTD (end December 2024) Visitor Rounds were up by over 2200 compared to the same period in 23/24.

Darley Golf Course is one of the best performing golf courses in 24/25, showing an increase in visitor rounds of 24% YTD, which reinforces the belief that with limited investment, usage and subsequently income increases can be achieved.

4. DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive 5-year development plan to actively increase the opportunity for young people and new golfers in South Ayrshire has been drafted and the service will be looking to obtain several internal and external partners, such as the Children's Golf Trust, Professional Golfers Association and Scottish Golf, to assist its delivery during 25/26.

The development plan sets out to increase the number of golfers in key areas including Young People, Females, and other under-represented demographics.

Key events such as 'The Open', Royal Troon and the 'Scottish Ladies Open', Dundonald and others not yet announced, should be used to increase participation and opportunity for the key demographics previously identified.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024

In summer 2024, GSA delivered targeted golf activity to young people at one of the local golf courses (Dalmilling). Two five-week blocks of sessions were promoted and delivered as part of a free summer programme for young people, with one session specifically for young people who were identified as at risk of missing out. All equipment was provided to ensure all young people could take part without any barriers. Coaching was provided by a local golf professional and young people were supported to attend, and engage in, the sessions by staff from the North Ayr Community Sports Hub and the Active Schools team.

We are currently developing a Winter Schools Competition to be held in February as a pilot opportunity, with a view to establishing a more formal series of competitions for South Ayrshire Secondary Schools in the Autumn 2025.

Active Schools are currently in discussions with several of the Troon Cluster Primary Schools to offer a series of golf lessons to P5 – P7 pupils. Participants will be sign posted to one of the Troon Golf Clubs to continue lessons and engagement in golf in 2025.

5. CLUBHOUSES

Whilst the catering facilities at Belleisle and Troon continue to recover from the impact of Covid during 2020/21, levels of custom are increasing, with footfall and income levels remaining strong throughout 2024. However, the current operating costs continues to outstrip the current income levels.

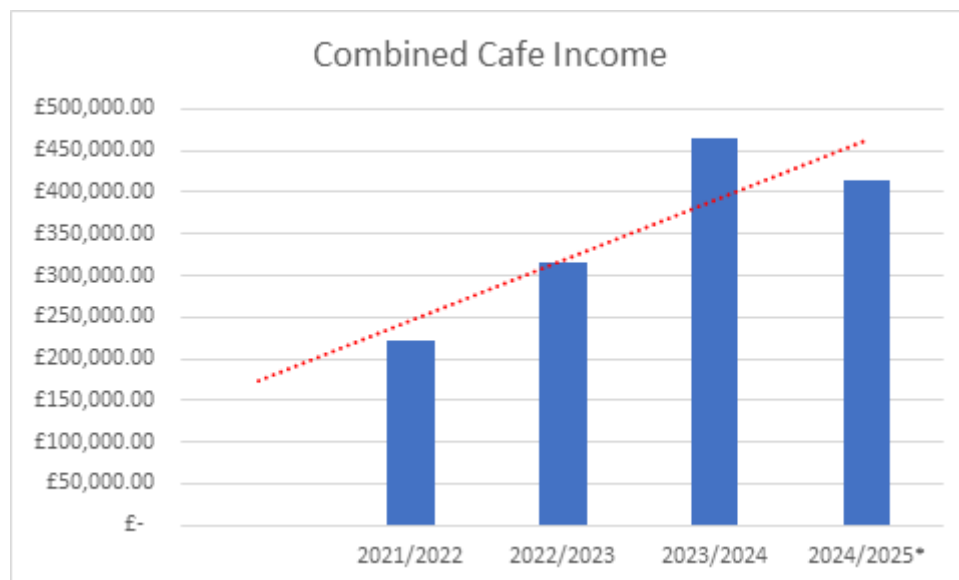
The Troon Links and Belleisle Park Clubhouses and The Stables Café have been refurbished during 2024, with new furniture throughout and the introduction of new lighting and additional décor. The venues are more welcoming than before and coupled with an improved menu, this has increased income and popularity.

Staffing and recruitment of skilled employees continues to be a challenge, however the service is currently in the early stages of the service redesign which is anticipated to address many of the current challenges.

A new, integrated ePOS system was introduced allowing the service to make the necessary steps towards cashless venues and with improved management reporting, permit senior officers to make informed decisions regarding stock control, profit maximisation and improved customer service.

The service completed a pilot project working alongside Procurement and the Community Wealth building team to engage with local suppliers and food producers to showcase some of Ayrshires finest produce. This was implemented in 2024 and is assisting the Council in supporting local Ayrshire Businesses.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024



The service is actively monitoring staffing costs (main expenditure) to attempt to reduce these to achieve a target cost of 40% of income.

Following an extensive customer survey, several changes to the menu, pricing, re-introduction of winter opening hours were implemented.

Whilst the local food framework is now operational with 12 suppliers appointed, they too have been subjected to inflationary costs, and due to their relatively small size have been unable to absorb many of these costs to minimise price increases. The service is still seeking to support local businesses where possible and is now using several Council Frameworks to obtain quality ingredients for the 3 venues.

6. ANCILLARY BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Replacement of maintenance and staff welfare facilities at Troon Links and Health and Safety (H&S) issues are progressing. Procurement and PDS are going through the design and build options at present.

Funding was secured from NatureScot to allow the service to work in partnership with the Environment and Sustainability Team and the Scottish Wildlife Trust to complete a Nature Restoration and Environmental Project on Belleisle Golf Course. This has seen the creation of a network of open water areas and linked waterways aimed at both enhancing the playability of the Golf Course and increase biodiversity through habitat creation.

Funding secured through the Place Based Investment Programme was used to create a network of paths to create a safe walking route through and around the perimeter of Darley Golf Course, Troon.

The service has also engaged with Ayrshire Roads Alliance to discuss the potential impact to Lochgreen and Darley Golf Courses with the planned upgrading of the National Cycle Network. A number of course alterations are required to ensure the safety of Pedestrians and Cyclists using the upgraded route.

Work will progress this year to identify potential opportunities to enhance the courses and staff welfare facilities subject to securing funding for these in years 5-10 of the strategy.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024

A full assessment and safety analysis of the proposed Active Travel route from Ayr to Barassie adjacent to Lochgreen and Darley Golf Courses has been completed along with a final design and Bill of Quantities submitted to Ayrshire Roads Alliance. The service remains in discussion with these organisations to protect the integrity of the golf courses and minimise disruption to all course users.

The asbestos roof for the Darley Maintenance Shed was replaced in August 2024.

The Staff Welfare project was costed by colleagues in Professional Design Services (PDS) to provide utilities into the preferred location. This piece of work was concluded in November 2024 and a Portacabin solution is now being progressed for the Greenkeeping Team at Troon Links.

The Belleisle Staff Welfare Portacabin Roof is currently being replaced, however a longer-term solution here for appropriate staff welfare facilities and machinery storage will be explored.

7. SALES AND ADMINISTRATION

The demand for tee times from season ticket holders continues to remain high.

Course utilisation of season ticket times, particularly on club competition days, generally Wednesday, Saturday and Sundays has improved significantly since the move to online priority booking and remains high.

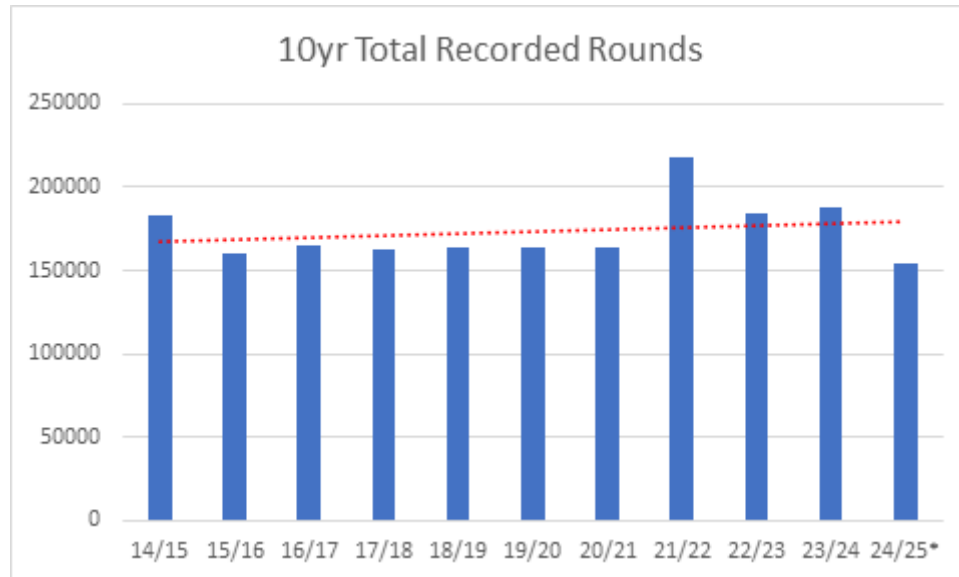
2023/24 playing statistics indicate rounds played by Season Ticket holders has remained consistent with the previous season. The sale of season tickets continues to be strong and higher than Pre-Pandemic levels.

The service continues to be in discussions with colleagues in Destination South Ayrshire on how to maximise the economic impact of the golf courses for tourism and help achieve income targets.

The Golf Festivals (Ayr Golf Week, Troon Links Weekender, Girvan Classic) were delivered again during 2024 following some changes in the format of competitions in the previous season.

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024

The total number of rounds recorded per annum remains higher than pre-pandemic levels and over the previous 10 years has remained relatively consistent. Please note that the figures for 24/25 are Year-To-Date figures and are projected to exceed 23/24 figures by the end of March 2025.



Whilst rounds played by Season Ticket holders has remained consistent with the previous year, the sale of season tickets remains high.

The format of Ayr Golf Week and competitions were reviewed again for the 2024 calendar of events, with fewer competitions played over fewer days. Competition Entries were not adversely affected and feedback from the competitors was generally positive regarding the new format.

The Troon Junior Open (Tom Lehman) was moved from its normal Tuesday date in August to be incorporated within the Troon Weekender Competition and entries increased by over 50% which far exceeded all expectations.

Since its inception in 2021, The Golf South Ayrshire Golf Club has continued to grow and establish itself as a viable option for golfers wishing to maintain a handicap and play golf competitively. 85 new members joined in 2024/25 taking the total membership to 222.

8. FINANCIAL

The service continues to work with colleagues in Finance and Procurement to monitor budgets and financial processes in line with the Councils policies and procedures.

FUNCTIONAL AREA	ACTION	COMPLETION DATE	ASSIGNED TO
Financial	Complete profiled projections for each key area of the service to achieve relevant KPI's as agreed	JUL 2025	KG / TC / AM / GP / KJ
Financial	Complete a Commercialisation Review of the Service exploring opportunities for new revenue streams and sources of income	MAR 2026	KG / AM / Transformation Team

9. GOVERNANCE

PROGRESS SINCE MARCH 2024

Several policies were reviewed and updated where required to reflect the increase in online bookings and clearly define our own processes when taking tee time bookings and other operational matters.

Policies that were reviewed are:

- Golf Buggy Policy – to ensure DDA compliance, steps were taken to ensure that fair and reasonable measures were taken to ensure access for those with a medical need. Including offering free use of GSA buggies, if ground conditions for personal buggies were not suitable and the creation of a defined winter buggy route.
- Visitor Terms and Conditions – defines how we will engage with customers, when we will expect payment and other important information aimed at improving our communication with customers and their overall experience when using our facilities.
- Golf Refund Policy – clearly defines under what instances a refund will be given for pre-booked rounds of golf. An emphasis on rearranging rounds wherever practical, rather than giving a refund is cutting down administration time and protecting income.
- Inclement weather policy – defines for greenkeepers and course users what we will do following extreme weather events or during inclement weather.
- Golf Visitor and Payment Guidance – A guide for staff to align our processes with the new Visitor Terms and Conditions, Refund Policy, and Inclement Weather Policy.

Health & Safety Policies:

Hole by Hole Risk Assessments defining the risks for golfers whilst playing the golf courses were completed for the following golf courses:

- Belleisle
- Seafield

- Darley
- Lochgreen
- Fullarton
- Dalmilling

An assessment of Girvan and Maybole are still to be completed.

The Golf Insurance Product was extended for a period of 12 months and a Quick Quote is currently underway to obtain a further 12 months cover (April 25 – March 26). A tender to provide a 3-year contract will be progressed by Procurement in 2025.

FUNCTIONAL AREA	ACTION	COMPLETION DATE	ASSIGNED TO
Governance	Review and propose a revised Structure for Golf based on achieving outcomes agreed within Strategy and new Council objectives.	JUL 2025	KG / AM / SCCHR
Governance	Review and Implement all Operational Health and Safety Policies	MAR 2026	KG / GP / KJ
	Hole by Hole Risk Assessments: Girvan Maybole	OCT 2025 OCT 2025	

SAC Golf South Ayrshire Portfolio

Belleisle Park

- ✓ 2 x 18-hole Parkland courses - Belleisle and Seafield, designed by James Braid
- ✓ New clubhouse opened in 2016
- ✓ Professional Services – provided by 3rd party
- ✓ Licensed café – operated by the Council
- ✓ Starter service – operated by the Council
- ✓ Indoor golf simulator
- ✓ 6-hole practice course / Short practice range
- ✓ Short game area
- ✓ Putting green
- ✓ Practice net
- ✓ 4 x buggies for hire – operated by the Council
- ✓ Club hire & trolley hire – operated by 3rd party

Troon Links

- ✓ 3 x 18-hole Links Courses; Darley, Lochgreen and Fullarton
- ✓ Refurbished clubhouse opened in 2017
- ✓ Professional services – provided by 3rd party
- ✓ Licensed café – operated by the Council
- ✓ Starter Service – operated by the Council
- ✓ 2 short practice ranges • Putting green
- ✓ 6 x buggies for hire (2 of 3 courses) – operated by the Council
- ✓ Club hire & trolley hire – operated by 3rd party

Dalmilling

- ✓ 1 x 18-hole Parkland course
- ✓ 1 x 18-hole FootGolf course
- ✓ Clubhouse requires extensive modernisation
- ✓ Licensed café – operated by 3rd party
- ✓ Starter service – operated by 3rd party on behalf of the Council
- ✓ Short practice range
- ✓ Short game area
- ✓ Putting green
- ✓ Practice net

Girvan

- ✓ 1 x 18-hole Links/Parkland Course; designed by James Braid
- ✓ Refurbished clubhouse opened in 2016
- ✓ Licensed café – operated by 3rd party
- ✓ Starter service – operated by the Council
- ✓ Putting green
- ✓ Practice net
- ✓ Trolley hire – operated by 3rd party

Maybole

- ✓ 1 x 9-hole Parkland Course

- ✓ 1 x 18-hole FootGolf Course
- ✓ Clubhouse minimal usage
- ✓ Starter service – none – payment taken at Swimming Pool
- ✓ Putting green
- ✓ Practice net