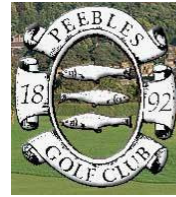




Nature: Hedge Planting

Peebles Golf Club



THE CHALLENGE

Peebles Golf Club invited SGEG to help them develop projects to further improve the appearance and biodiversity of their golf course. During the visit, almost 1km of fenced and otherwise featureless boundaries on the southern and western edges of the course, seemed an ideal opportunity for new hedging and on a scale rarely available on golf courses.

Many golf courses, particularly those derived from farmed landscapes, do feature or inherit hedges or their remnants. Whilst existing boundary hedges often remain more or less intact, the nature of golf course layout and play has often meant that hedges within golf courses have become fragmented or removed altogether. Through appropriate management, intact and remnant hedges will continue to contribute to the biodiversity of the golf course. By and large, scope for new hedge creation on golf courses will be restricted to boundaries, typically those which were previously fenced or open. This was the case at Peebles but of such a length and sighting that could make a huge contribution to the enrichment of the local habitat network and biodiversity.

THE SOLUTION

The club was very enthusiastic and a design was drawn up for two sections of mixed native hedge with hedgerow trees. The first ran westerly from the clubhouse to the group of trees behind the 2nd green incorporating a number of existing individual and groups of semi-mature lime and sycamore trees along the way. The second section ran north westerly along the entire left hand side of the 4th hole. Here the design included the widening of the hedge at two points to form small copses of several dozen trees and shrubs to give additional habitat and landscape value and help shape the hole. This section created a new wildlife corridor between the adjacent farmland and the golf course whilst also creating further linkage between the neighbouring woodlands at either end of the 4th hole. New fences were erected inside the existing fence lines to create 2m wide corridors into which the hedges were planted and which were made entirely rabbit-proof with netting. The hedge was planted in a double staggered row at 6 plants per metre using bare root whips. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) grant funding of £1500 was obtained for this project with the assistance of SGEG.

Only native species were used, as follows:

Hedge species: hawthorn, blackthorn, dogrose, holly, hazel, elder, guelder rose

Hedgerow trees: oak, ash, lime (every 2metres). Copse species: oak, ash, rowan, silver birch, hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, elder, gean, guelder rose.

Weed competition was suppressed with annual applications of glyphosate for three years with occasional hand clearance of broadleaf weeds such as thistles. All the preparation, planting and maintenance work was carried out by the club's greenstaff. This took approximately five staff one full week, including weed killing, fence erection and planting.

THE OUTCOMES

Due to the quality of the stock, the planting technique, the fertile soil conditions and the maintenance operations, the hedge established extremely well with good growth from the outset. Only in sections under mature trees have the plants been held back due to shade and possibly competition for moisture. However, some holly plants were leaning and inspection of the severed stump end suggested gnawing by small incisors. Closer inspection of the main stem and branches revealed masses of little teeth marks resulting in all sorts of patterns of bark removal, some severe enough to kill the plants even had they not been severed at the root.

The weed control had been very effective, but the dead vegetation had been left in situ, creating a continuous mat over the ground. Closer inspection revealed small holes across the surface of this mat, often near the damaged holly plants. At one of these holes was a large heap of tiny vole droppings.



New Hedge 2003



Hedge 2007

The conclusion was that whilst keeping the rabbits out with netting and controlling the weeds successfully, the new hedgerow was tailor-made habitat for voles. Not only had the dead weed mat provided the well-recognised ideal continuous cover for them at ground level, the strongly growing hedge plants had knitted together along the entire hedgeline to provide a thorny canopy as perfect protection from owls and kestrels! The holly must have just been so much tastier than the other species and in quite ample supply. The only answer was to avoid the dead weeds matting, protect the remaining holly with spiral or vole guards and beat up the lost holly.

Despite this glitch, both hedges have gone from strength to strength. In this single very successful project, Peebles Golf Club has achieved stronger boundary definition, landscape enhancement, public amenity, habitat creation, habitat linkage and increased biodiversity. The groundlayer is already a maze of wildlife passages and lying areas. Now the hedge is beyond the need for weed control, wildflowers are beginning to move in too – yarrow, lesser stitchwort, ribwort plantain.



This image shows the hedge at present, 2010 and shows the success of the planting.