



Scottish Natural Heritage

TROON GOLF LINKS AND FORESHORE SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1565

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Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

Troon Golf Links and Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), lying immediately south of Troon has the most significant sand dune system in Ayrshire. A large portion of the dune habitat within the site has been utilised as a links golf course since 1878. Dune habitats present within the site comprise varied mobile dune vegetation, including areas of both marram grass, and lyme grass, giving way to semi-fixed dune. The golf course has retained areas of calcareous dune grassland, acid dune grassland and dune heath. The dune flora includes the Nationally Scarce Isle of Man cabbage *Coincya monensis monensis*, which is endemic to the British Isles.

Within the site a suite of dune habitats exists: strand and embryo dunes occur in all areas of foredune and strandplain with a transition to saltmarsh in some areas. Further inland, sequences of semi-fixed dune to short sward grassland are found and moving inshore further still, a sequence occurs from calcareous to acidic dune grassland.

The sand dune feature is considered to be in an unfavourable condition due to its poor structure and species composition. The site has (since 1878) been used as a golf course and as a result has experienced intensive management, which has included a level of fragmentation, herbicide application, mowing and coastal protection. Parts of the dune therefore have a reduced species composition, with some areas growing rank, favouring coarse, undesirable plant species. Before the site was designated the transition from sand dunes to terrestrial habitats had been prevented along the entire length of the site by the railway line running to the east. Furthermore, some years ago, inappropriate beach cleaning by the Local Authority caused significant damage to the foredune areas. This practice has since been discontinued.

A review of golf course management may enable the less intensively managed sections of the course, such as the 'roughs', to be brought into a more favourable condition. The golf course has adopted a conservation management plan that aims to address the number of invasive and exotic species on the dunes, and rejuvenate any scrub areas through cutting and burning. Although these operations are likely to be acceptable to SNH, consent is required for these operations to be carried out on the SSSI.

Within the site the sandy beach and rocky outcrops on the shore, some of which form islands at high tide, are also of significance for the numbers of passage/wintering wildfowl and waders - particularly curlew, that they support. The rocks at Meikle Craigs are an important gull roost and moulting area for eider ducks.

Natural features of Troon Golf Links and Foreshore SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Sand dune	Unfavourable, no change (August 2002)

	
Sea defence works with strandline protection	South of site, north of estuary showing changes in land cover from sea over the dune edge

Past and present management

The site has been part of a golf course since 1878 and it remains frequently used. The Royal Troon Golf Club periodically hosts the Open golf championships when numerous spectators converge on the site. Grandstands are erected on the SSSI overlooking greens and tees and a hospitality complex is located adjacent to the SSSI.

The golf club use areas within the site as greens, tees and fairways. These areas are managed using a variety of methods: all the areas are regularly mown and aerated; herbicides and fertilisers are applied to the greens and tees; top dressing with sand and peat/soil mixture is added to the greens; and fairways are watered using a sprinkler system. The playing surface within the golf course is intensively managed.

The golf club also manages dune erosion within the SSSI and in 1993 they installed erosion control measures at the south end of the dunes at the mouth of the Pow Burn. This appears to have been successful. SNH welcomes the Management Plan devised by the Golf Club and will liaise where appropriate to ensure the interests of the Golf Club and the nature conservation value of the SSSI work in sympathy.

The beach has long been used for informal recreation. In 1994 there was an unfortunate incident of inappropriate beach cleaning by the local authority that caused damage to the foredunes, from which the area is slowly recovering.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and/or occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management.

1. **To maintain and enhance, where possible, the foreshore, sand dune and dune grassland habitats** by ensuring protection from damaging impacts, in particular ensuring only essential beach cleaning work is conducted and is undertaken by hand in a manner which will not be damaging to the habitat. Regeneration of tree species should also be removed and any future planting actively discouraged. Scrub should also be removed, where appropriate.

The presence of undesirable non-native conifers may require to be controlled and any further planting on the Golf Course within the dune system should be discouraged. Conifer regeneration has occurred on the golf course, the seed source of which is the conifer plantation to the east of the railway line which forms the eastern boundary of the site. This tree regeneration should be removed. Some conifers also appear to have been planted on the golf course and as these are non-native species they are undesirable within the context of dune grassland habitat. The spread of gorse scrub within the SSSI both along the eastern boundary of the site, adjacent to the railway line and within the roughs requires management if deemed appropriate. There is a danger that the spread of gorse could lead to a reduction in the diversity of the valuable dune grassland habitat.

The dunes at Troon are fairly stable; however there are some problems with erosion which appears to be under control at present. Coastal erosion is, in general, a natural process, fundamental to the natural functioning and evolution of the coastline. However, it can also be caused or exacerbated by sand extraction and trampling. There is a well trampled path behind the dunes which is frequently used, with walkers using gaps between sand dunes to provide short cuts to the beach. There has been concern in the past that this may have contributed to dune erosion. The positioning of greens, tees and fairways near to the shore can restrict the options for coastal management by forcing protection of areas which are naturally eroding.

Front page photograph: View of south end of SSSI looking north, north of the estuary and showing existing strand line and foreshore (as at 19 June 2008).

Date last reviewed: 1 October 2010