



SEATON CAREW GOLF CLUB

Founded 1874

The Case for One Permanent 18-Hole Course

Securing the long-term future of our golf course and our Club

DOCUMENT 1 OF 3

An information pack for members · July 2026

Part of a three-booklet pack, read alongside the Member Q&A Booklet (2 of 3) and Phasing & Costings of the Works (3 of 3).

In short

Seaton Carew is considering moving from its current 22-hole, multi-layout course to one clearly defined, permanent 18-hole championship course.

This is not about giving up our history or losing what makes Seaton Carew special. It is about giving the Club the best possible future by putting all our time, money and effort into one outstanding course rather than spreading it thinly across more holes than we need.

The simple idea behind it is this: do one thing exceptionally well. The Greens Committee, the course management team and several leading industry experts all believe that one permanent 18-hole course is now the right direction for the Club. In the pages that follow we explain why, set out the history and the costs, and answer the questions members are most likely to ask.

What members are being asked to weigh up: do we carry on managing several overlapping layouts, or do we create one course that we maintain to the highest standard and that secures the Club for the long term?

A little history

Seaton Carew has one of the richest golfing histories in England, and that history is part of the reason this decision deserves real care.

The Club opened in 1874 as a 14-hole course and grew to 18 holes in 1891. In 1925 the celebrated architect Alister MacKenzie redesigned it, adding new holes and moving the golf onto the stronger, more natural links ground. The course we play today, though, was never built to a single master plan — it grew piece by piece over many decades, each change a response to the circumstances of the time.

In 1964 J. F. Pennink drew up the first complete vision for a modern championship course. In the mid-1970s four extra holes were added to the east of the site, creating the “New Course”, while the “Old Course” stayed in use for certain occasions. The Brabazon layout was put together in 1985 to host the Brabazon Trophy, and in 1986 Gerald Micklem designed a more balanced championship routing. Over time these settled into the rotation of Old, New, Brabazon and Micklem courses, with the “Bishop” layout used in the wettest months. In 2020 the Micklem became our main summer course, and national recognition soon followed.

The point of telling this story is simple. Adaptation has always been part of who we are. And the 22-hole arrangement we have today was never chosen as the best long-term model — it grew up gradually, decision by decision. It is fair, then, to ask whether it is still the right model now.

On “championship”: when this document calls Seaton Carew a championship course, it does not simply mean long or difficult. It means a course of the quality, presentation and standing expected of a serious competition venue. Seaton Carew has earned that description over more than a century — from the first Durham County Championship in 1908 to the British Boys and British Girls Championships, the Brabazon and Carris Trophies, the English Men’s County Finals, and the Men’s and Women’s English Amateur Championships in 2024.

Where we are today

Any decision about the future must start with an honest look at where the Club stands now.

Seaton Carew is a historic and unusual links, but it is run in a very modern world. The whole course is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Four holes sit on land over the road, controlled mainly by PD Ports with part held by the Crown Estate. The Committee has looked closely at this and is satisfied the arrangement is stable and worth continuing — and, should that ever change, a straightforward fallback plan is ready to put in place.

At the same time, the pressures on golf clubs have grown. Labour, machinery and materials all cost far more than they used to, the rules we operate under are more demanding, and members rightly expect the course to be presented to a consistently high standard. Since 2020, concentrating on the Micklem layout in summer has lifted the course’s standing — which makes it all the more worth asking whether we would do even better by focusing fully on a single course.

Why ask the question now?

Some members will reasonably wonder why we should change something that has been in place for so long. The answer is not that the current course has failed — far from it. It is that the conditions golf clubs work in have changed, and it is the responsibility of every generation to check that what it has inherited still serves the Club well.

The honest truth is that running 22 holes has left its mark. Carrying more holes than a standard course, without the extra income to pay for them, has made it harder to keep on top of the basics. Years of stretched resources show up across the site in ways members will recognise:

- Worn car parks, buildings, tracks and boundary fences.
- Holes that sit too close to opposing play, which raises real safety concerns.
- A public right of way and public and dog access cutting across the course, with no proper site security.
- No high-standard toilet or refreshment facilities out on the course, again because the site cannot be secured.
- A confusing routing that crosses redundant holes and changes the walk depending on the layout in play.

- Tired paths, uneven and wrongly sized tees, and bunkers that need work — with no cheap sand option available.
- Not enough irrigation water to do 22 holes justice, plus areas of poor ground and localised flooding.
- Cheap, temporary signage, because permanent signs make little sense across rotating layouts on an unsecured site.

None of this is a criticism of those who came before us. It is simply the reality of spreading limited resources across too large a footprint — and it is the starting point for everything that follows.

The case for one permanent course

1. A better course, more consistently

Put every hour of greenkeeping, every machine and every pound of the budget into 18 holes instead of 22, and the course gets better. It is as straightforward as that. Greens, fairways and presentation become more consistent, standards hold up right through the year, and effort stops being diluted across holes that are often not even in play. A club of Seaton Carew's standing should be putting its best foot forward on one course — not stretching itself across a larger and more complicated site than it needs.

Our greenkeeping team and our links land are both best served by one permanent 18-hole course, looked after to the highest possible standard.

2. A clear and confident identity

Our many named layouts are part of the Club's story, but they can also muddy the picture. Long-standing members follow the distinctions easily; visitors, guests and outside bodies often do not. One settled course lets Seaton Carew be known, first and foremost, for a single outstanding layout on the very best of our links ground.

That recognition is already showing through. Since the Micklem became our main summer course, visitor green-fee income has risen by almost 280% and National Club Golfer has ranked Seaton Carew the 92nd best course in Great Britain and Ireland. Routing is not the only reason for that, but a clearer identity has plainly helped.

And to be clear, this would take nothing away from our heritage. The Old, New, Brabazon, Micklem and Bishop layouts can all be properly celebrated — through historic maps, photographs, plans, competition records and a written timeline in the clubhouse. A permanent course would also protect the best of what we have: the finest golfing ground, the natural features and the strategic interest that make Seaton Carew what it is. The heritage isn't lost; it is told more clearly.

3. Smarter use of money and effort

Running several layouts across 22 holes costs more than running one course of 18 — not just in mowing and materials, but in planning, signage, scorecards and how the team’s time is shared out. A single course lets the Club budget with confidence and aims its spending where it makes the biggest difference.

This is not really a cost-cutting exercise, and it is fair not to overstate the savings. The real prize is being able to spend what we have far more effectively — on tees, paths, bunkers, fairways and the things that improve a member’s round — rather than seeing it thinned out across a wider footprint.

The Club’s finances stretch much further across one well-chosen 18-hole course than across 22.

4. Certainty for long-term planning

One settled course makes it far easier to plan ahead with confidence — to map out infrastructure work, prioritise improvements and invest capital knowing exactly where it is going. Where future work touches the holes over the road, it will always be planned alongside a carefully considered fallback option, so the Club keeps its choices open for the long term.

5. A responsible approach to the environment

Given the site’s protected status, any long-term plan must be one we can manage responsibly. We should be honest that moving to a permanent layout is not automatically better for the environment in every respect — any physical works would need proper assessment and, where required, consent.

That said, a single, settled course is generally easier to manage well: easier to align with modern habitat and stewardship expectations, easier to plan works around, and easier to discuss with the bodies that oversee the site. The environmental case, properly put, is one of clarity and good long-term stewardship.

What the numbers say

It helps to see the difference in black and white. Looking only at greens, tees and surrounds, fairways and bunkers — the four areas that take most of the day-to-day budget — bringing the additional four holes that aren’t included in the Micklem routing up to the same standard would cost the Club an extra £37,000 a year, with no extra income to show for it.

Area of the course	18 holes	22 holes	Difference
Greens	£70,700	£84,840	£14,140
Tees & surrounds	£13,248	£16,192	£2,944
Fairways	£13,298	£16,844	£3,546

Area of the course	18 holes	22 holes	Difference
Bunkers	£18,600	£35,150	£16,550
Estimated total	£115,846	£153,026	£37,180

These are estimates, and they deliberately leave out the larger capital sums that bringing every hole up to standard would eventually demand — things like tee rebuilds, new irrigation and path work, which can run from £5,000 to £25,000 per hole. (A fuller breakdown of how these figures are reached is set out in the appendix.)

A word from the Course Manager

I have always loved the golfing land at Seaton Carew, but it has long been clear to me that running multiple layouts has held both the course and the Club back.

It is no coincidence that focusing on one layout in summer has lifted the course's standard in recent years, when for decades before that its reputation tended to drift — weighed down, I have no doubt, by the burden of extra holes that bring in no extra income. In the modern game it makes little practical sense to carry holes that sit unused for long stretches. All it does is spread the team and the budget thinner and hold the presentation back, at a time when labour and materials have never cost more and members' expectations have never been higher.

Put plainly, 22 holes is not one golf course — it is closer to 1.22 courses, or 22% more ground to look after. At current rates that is roughly £37,000 a season extra to bring those holes up to the same standard as the Micklem, for no return — money that could instead be lifting the quality of the course members actually play.

My firm view is that we should bring in a leading architect to design an 18-hole routing that uses the very best of our land, puts right the long-standing problems, and keeps faith with the many fine holes we already have. Done well and delivered affordably and without undue disruption over a sensible period, it would give us a course that sustains the Club for the long term and gives members and visitors something truly special. This is our chance to set the Club on a clear, positive path — and, in my honest opinion, carrying on with 22 holes would only hold that potential back.

Tom Coulson

Course Manager (2020–present)

A word from the Club Professional

Over the past four years I have spoken with countless members and visiting golfers, and it gives you a clear sense of what people really think of the course, the facilities and their whole journey from arrival to departure.

When visitors book, they often ask which layout they should play — they want the best ‘ranked’ course they have heard and read about. These days I regularly finish a round and hear Seaton Carew spoken of in the same breath as the best links in the country, something that was far rarer when I arrived. People remember a course that is presented well and plays consistently. They come back, and they tell others.

The flip side is the confusion of five possible layouts. At sign-in my welcome is often a long one, explaining that we haven’t actually got 90 holes and five courses. Simplifying this would put an end to the regular problems of golfers playing to the wrong greens and losing their way round. For someone visiting once, it simply isn’t easy to follow.

With a much busier practice facility now, the closeness of the 18th green and 1st tee, together with the narrow path past the first tee to the range, creates real operational headaches too.

The club is a different animal to five years ago — greater playing numbers, higher member and guest expectations, and a significant increase in what we charge. One considered layout would be my clear recommendation going forward.

Martyn Stubbings

PGA Professional

Your questions answered

“Will we lose any land?”

No. No land is being given up. This is about how we use the ground we have, not about losing any of it.

“Will the Club lose its history?”

No. Our history is one of our greatest strengths and stays at the heart of who we are. This concerns the day-to-day course we play and maintain — not the heritage, which we would aim to display and celebrate more clearly than ever.

“Will members lose out to visitors?”

Quite the opposite. Members remain the priority. A clearer, better course is easier to promote and brings in healthy visitor income, and that income supports the quality of the Club that members enjoy every week.

“Will members lose value?”

The aim is the reverse. Members should gain — better conditioning, more consistency, stronger presentation, clearer routing, better facilities and a more enjoyable round. Value is not being reduced; quality is being raised.

“Why change something so unusual?”

Being unusual is not, on its own, a reason to keep something. The honest question is whether 22 holes truly serves us better than one outstanding course would. We don't believe it does. There may be a little less variety in routings — but the real variety in links golf comes from the weather, the conditions, the pin positions and competition play, not from switching between holes.

Being honest about the risks

A change of this kind must be approached carefully, and this document does not pretend every detail is settled. There are real risks in getting it wrong — choosing the wrong final routing, underestimating the cost, causing needless disruption during the changeover, or failing to deliver the quality we are promising. We take all of that seriously.

Before any final decision is put to members, the Club will set out:

- the proposed permanent routing, and why it was chosen;
- the financial implications and a likely timescale;
- the impact on competitions and winter golf;
- the future role of any holes outside the permanent 18;
- the relevant environmental and land considerations; and
- the expected benefit to the course and the membership.

This paper is here to give you the background and the case. The path for having your say is set out under “What happens next” below.

Where we believe the Club should go

Our 22-hole, multi-layout course has a long and genuine history, and that deserves real respect. But history alone is not a reason to keep a model that may no longer be the best one for our future. Modern club management asks us to weigh quality, efficiency, value for members, financial health, environmental responsibility and long-term clarity — and, weighed together, the case for one permanent 18-hole course is a strong one.

Having looked at all of this in detail, and with the long-standing problems across the site firmly in mind, the Greens Committee and course management team — supported by leading industry experts who have viewed the site with fresh eyes — believe that Seaton Carew is best served by one standalone 18-hole course.

The proposal to come, from **Tom Mackenzie of Mackenzie & Ebert** — among the most respected links architects in the game — is, in our view, the most favourable option for the Club’s long-term health. It would give members and visitors the course this remarkable stretch of land should always have provided, while putting right the issues that have held us back for years.

We hope members will see the value in it and lend it their support, as we set out to give Seaton Carew the course it truly deserves.

What happens next

This is a genuine consultation, and we want every member to be well informed before they are asked what they think. Here is the path, step by step.

<p>1 July 2026</p>	<p>The full information pack — three booklets: The Case for One Permanent 18-Hole Course, Member Q&A, and Phasing & Costings of the Works — is published to members via the website, email and the club notice boards.</p>
<p>By 10 July 2026</p>	<p>Members wishing to attend the presentation should confirm with the Club Manager, as capacity is limited to 200. Members are also invited to email any questions on the proposal — design, phasing or costs — to greens@seatoncarewgolfclub.co.uk. Sending questions in advance means each one can be answered fully, with common themes grouped together.</p>
<p>Mon 13 July 2026, 6:30pm</p>	<p>Member presentation evening at Hartlepool College of Further Education. Tom Mackenzie of Mackenzie & Ebert presents the proposed design and answers questions on routing and design. The Greens Committee answers all other submitted questions, including phasing and costs. The evening will be recorded.</p>
<p>Shortly after</p>	<p>The Secretary will email all members a link to the recording, together with a written summary of the questions and answers.</p>
<p>Clubhouse drop-ins</p>	<p>The Chairman of Greens and the Course Manager will be in the clubhouse to answer questions in person — Friday 17 July (9:00–11:00am), Thursday 23 July (5:00–7:00pm) and Wednesday 29 July (2:00–4:00pm).</p>
<p>1–14 August 2026</p>	<p>A short, anonymous member survey (a SurveyMonkey link, emailed by the Secretary) to gauge members’ support for moving to a permanent 18-hole course.</p>
<p>In due course</p>	<p>Any significant change of this kind would ultimately be decided by the members themselves, in the proper way, through the Club’s usual decision-making process — and only once all the feedback is in and everything has been fully discussed.</p>

Nothing here is a foregone conclusion. This stage is about giving you the full picture — the case, the answers to your questions, and the phasing and costs — and listening to what you think before anything is decided.

Timeline of key developments

Year	Development
1874	The Club is founded, playing over 14 holes.
1891	The course is extended to a full 18 holes.
1925	Alistair MacKenzie redesigns the course, adding new holes and making far better use of the natural links land.
1964	J. F. Pennink is commissioned to produce the first complete plan for a modern championship course.
Mid-1970s	Four new holes are built to the east of the site, creating what becomes known as the “New Course.”
1985	A composite “Brabazon” layout is created to host the Brabazon Trophy.
1986	Gerald Micklem designs a more balanced championship routing — the Micklem layout we know today.
2020	The Micklem layout is adopted as the Club’s main summer course, and national recognition follows.
Today	The Club is asking whether one permanent 18-hole course is now the best way forward.

Appendix: the cost of the extra holes

This appendix shows how the headline figure of roughly £37,000 a year is reached. Golf course management comes down to matching the resources available against what the course actually demands. A well-kept course needs more than a neglected one — and a course with extra holes needs more than one without. Usually those extra holes earn their keep: a 27-hole venue, for instance, has a nine that is in play and paid for. Seaton Carew is the odd case where four holes sit unused for long stretches yet still have to be maintained. The figures below are estimates, but they show the scale of that burden clearly enough.

Greens

Greens are the most resource-hungry part of any course — sand, seed, fertiliser, wetting agents, fungicides and turf treatments, plus the mowing, rolling, aeration, spraying and top-dressing that go with them. At Seaton Carew the cost works out at roughly £3,535 per green per year, broken down approximately as: sand £258; fertiliser £135; fungicide £212; seed £240; wetting agents £181; turf-health products £120; water £120; labour about £1,000 (around 76 hours); machinery depreciation about £1,266; and fuel about £110.

20 greens (18-hole course): about £70,700 a year. 24 greens (22-hole course): about £84,840 a year.

Fairways

Fairways currently get only the basics — a weekly cut in the growing season and an annual feed; wetting agents, which would help a lot, are beyond reach as things stand. Costs run to roughly £210 of materials per hole and about £279 of labour per fairway, plus machinery.

18 holes: about £13,298 a year. 22 holes: about £16,844 a year.

Tees and surrounds

Tees and surrounds take a couple of feeds, a little water, seed and wetting agent, and a good deal of mowing — around 884 staff hours across the year. Labour works out at roughly £619 per hole, materials about £85 per hole, and machinery around £736 per hole.

18 holes: about £13,248 a year. 22 holes: about £16,192 a year.

Bunkers

We are part-way through replacing bunker sand, at around £700 per bunker. The Micklem layout has 64 bunkers; the full 22-hole site has 87. Replacement alone is roughly £15,400 for the 18-hole course against £30,800 for 22, and annual top-ups add about £3,200 versus £4,350.

18 holes: about £18,600 a year. 22 holes: about £35,150 a year.

Water for irrigation

Water is the resource that worries us most for the future. As summers get hotter the course will need more of it, not less, and it is becoming both scarcer and more expensive. The plain fact is that we do not currently have enough water to do 18 holes full justice — so stretching it across 22 only makes matters worse. Concentrating what we have on a single course would protect the turf far better through the serious droughts that some summers now bring, especially on the fairways, which need the most.

The bottom line

Even looking only at greens, tees and surrounds, fairways and bunkers, the extra four holes would cost the Club around £37,000 every year extra to bring up to standard and maintain — money that earns no return. And that is before the major capital work that bringing every hole up to standard would require.

Investing all resources into 18 holes would bring *real, visible improvements* — and that is the heart of the case for our members.