



The Golf House Club Elie

Strategic Golf Course Review of Earlsferry & Elie Links

Prepared by

European Golf Design



December 2022



10th Hole, Earlsferry & Elie Links

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The Golf Course	2
2.1	Golf Course Layout	2
2.2	Bunkers	4
2.3	Greens	11
2.4	Tees	12
2.5	Fairways	14
2.6	Paths	15
2.7	Golf Course Safety	16
3	Golf Course Proposals	20
3.1	Hole by Hole Design Proposals	21
4	Summary	76



5th Hole

I. Introduction

European Golf Design (EGD) has been commissioned to carry out a review of the golf course at The Golf House Club, Elie. The objective is to prepare a strategic masterplan to identify areas for short, medium and long term improvements to the course.

This document will review elements such as the golf course design, playability and safety, and look in particular at greens, bunkers, teeing areas and other items such as pathways, irrigation and course presentation. It will help to inform decision making about future course developments and assist in the prioritisation of any such works.

This is an updated review of Earlsferry and Elie Links following feedback from the golf club in February 2023.



7th green





2. The Golf Course

2.1 Layout

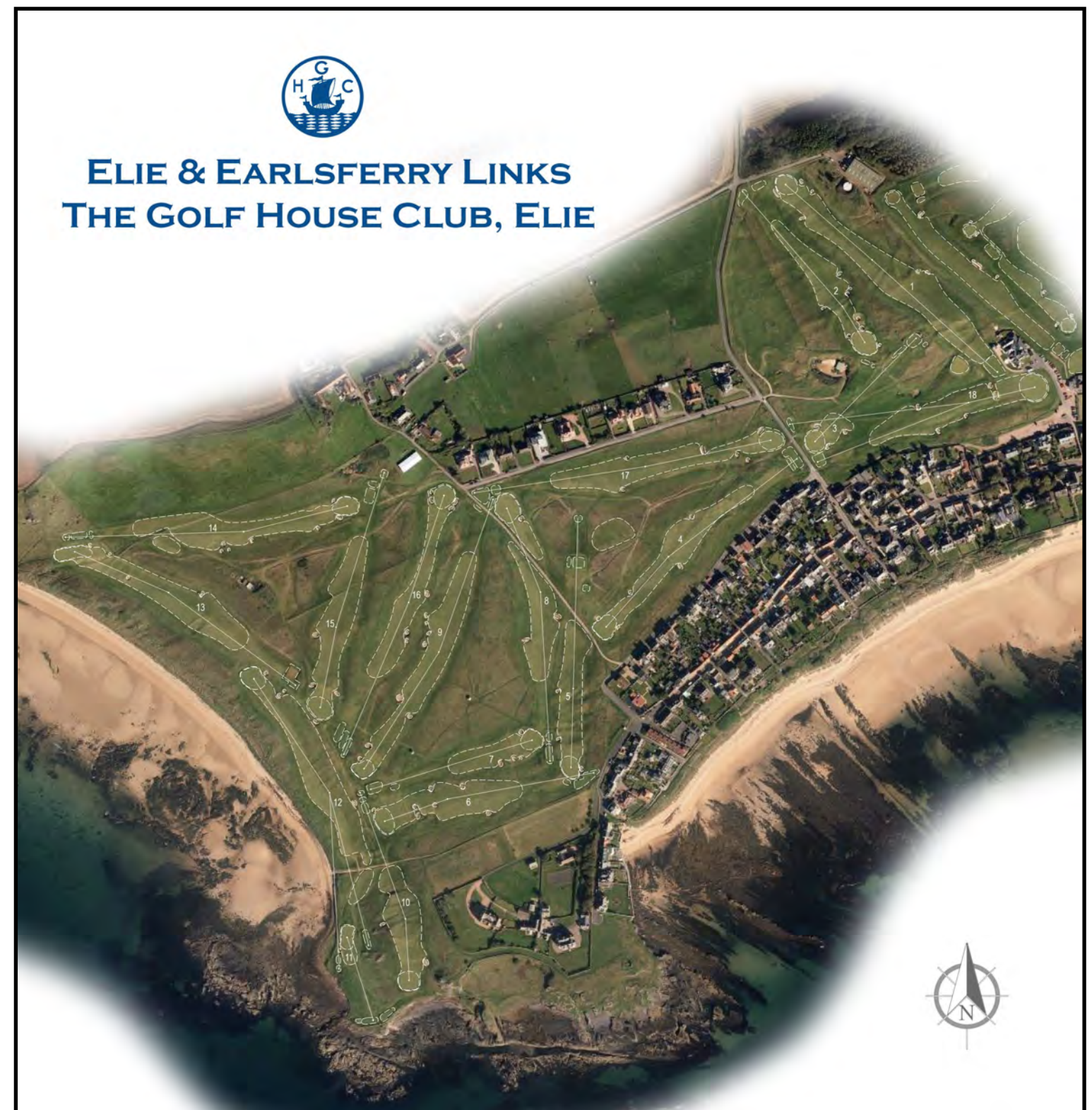
The first mention of golf at Elie and Earlsferry comes from a 1589 Burgh Charter which confirmed the “right of golf”, but it is possible that golf was played on ‘Earlsferry Mure’ as early as the 15th Century. Recently discovered records indicate that the Earlsferry Golf Society played over at least part of the present course in the 1780’s, making it the third oldest in the world.

The course layout has adapted over time, increasing from 9 holes to 14 in 1886 and finally becoming 18 holes on 6th October 1895. The responsibility for the final layout of the holes has been attributed to Old Tom Morris, although, interestingly, there is no mention of him in the Centenary History of The Golf House Club from 1975.

At 6273 yards from the white tees, the present course could not be described as long, especially by modern standards, but the influence of the wind is an important factor and the effective length of each golf hole can change hugely depending on conditions.

It is something of an oddity that there are no par 5s and only two par 3s from the men’s tees. But, despite this, the strength of the course lies in its variation, with as fine a selection of short, medium and long par 4s as you could wish. The shorter par 4s are often tricky and require accurate approach play, made more challenging by the number of greens that slope away from the direction of play. At least nine greens on the course have this characteristic, which is something often frowned upon in the world of golf course design today, but seems to work wonderfully well here.

There is a slight imbalance between the lengths of the outward and inward nines, with the back nine being 171 yards longer. This is largely due to the outward nine having rather more medium length par 4s, while the inward nine has four holes well in excess of 400 yards. At least two of the par 4s (the 7th and 10th) are potentially drivable holes, whilst the 2nd, 5th and 6th holes generally require only the shortest of approach shots.



From the women's tees the course measures 5,768 yards, which compared to the length of the course for men, is a little on the long side. Indeed there is less than 250 yards difference between the red tees and the yellow, general play tees.

The differences between the course for women and men is reflected by the respective total pars of 73 and 70. The 1st, 9th 12th and 17th are all par 5's for women, whilst, somewhat strangely, the 7th is a par 3.

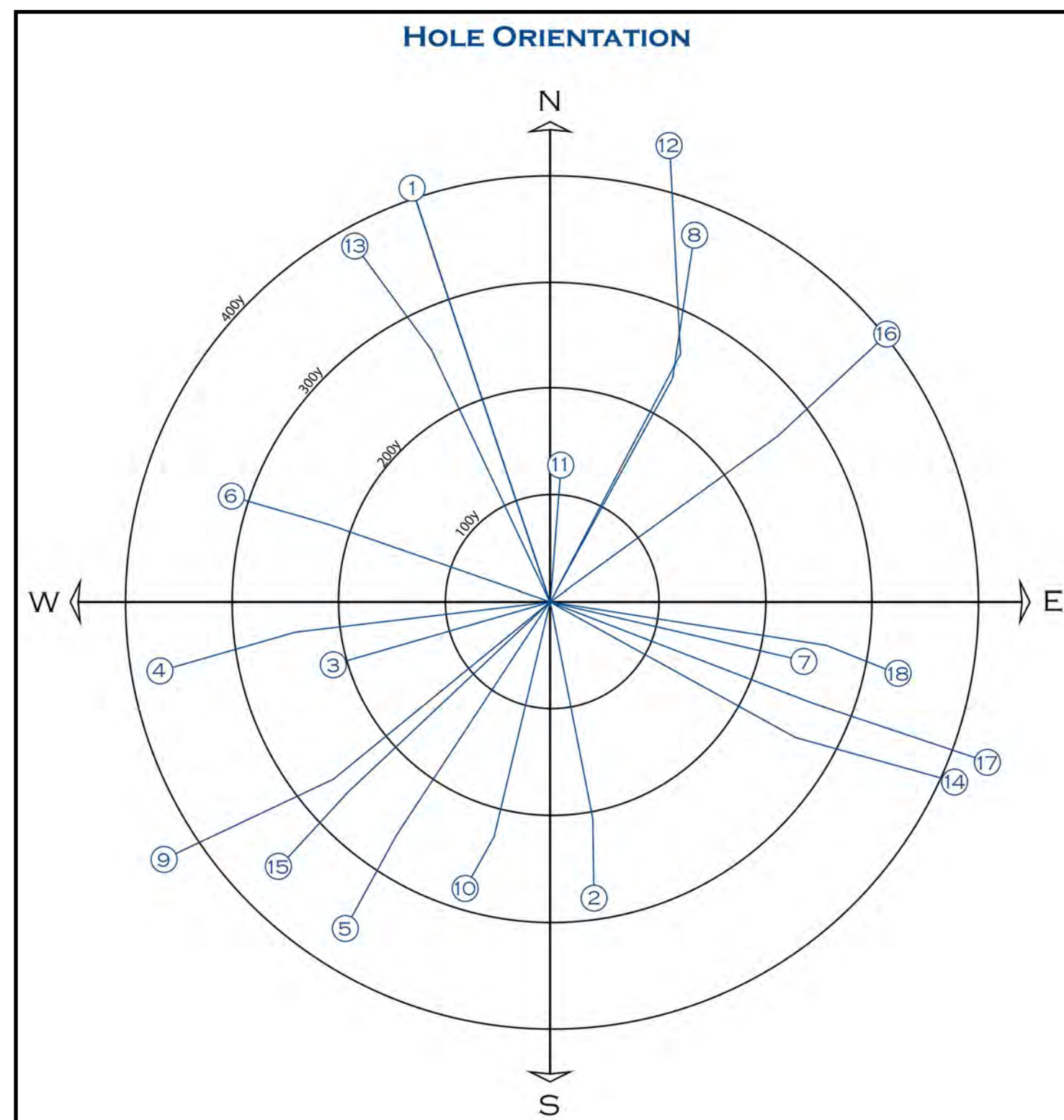
With much of the course boundary marked by housing and roads it is difficult to see where any additional yardage could be found to lengthen the course from the white tees, with perhaps the exception of the space behind the 15th tee.

However, with the shortest tee set (the Red) measuring almost 5,800 yards, there may be an opportunity to add some forward tees to create a more playable option for those golfers who don't hit the ball so far.

In general terms the course plays out to the west until the 10th hole before heading home to the east and, as the prevailing winds are generally from the west or east, it is always likely that a number of holes will be played either into the wind or downwind during a round. However, the course has been cleverly laid out so that never more than two consecutive holes play in exactly the same direction, a good factor on a course where wind plays such an important part in its playability.

The Hole Orientation diagram clearly illustrates how well balanced the hole directions are throughout each quadrant of the compass. Of particular note is how the long par 4's (those in excess of 400yards) are spread around the compass.

The routing makes superb use of the site's natural features to create a truly memorable experience for the golfer. From the 1st tee with its blind drive, through to the vast 18th green, the course offers plenty of interest, testing most clubs in the bag and offering a wide variety of shot making opportunities.



There is plenty to admire with the strategic test as well, with the 4th, 8th and 13th being particularly noteworthy, although most holes offer their own risk and reward opportunities.

There are a variety of flat and undulating fairways and, despite the generally large putting surfaces, the slopes on and around the greens put the premium on having a sharp short game in order to score well.

2.2 Bunkers

The course has 86 bunkers. Most have revetted faces in the traditional links style and are fairly small. A few are difficult to see from the playing areas, although recent work on bunkering, such as at the 9th hole, has improved the visibility of some bunkers.

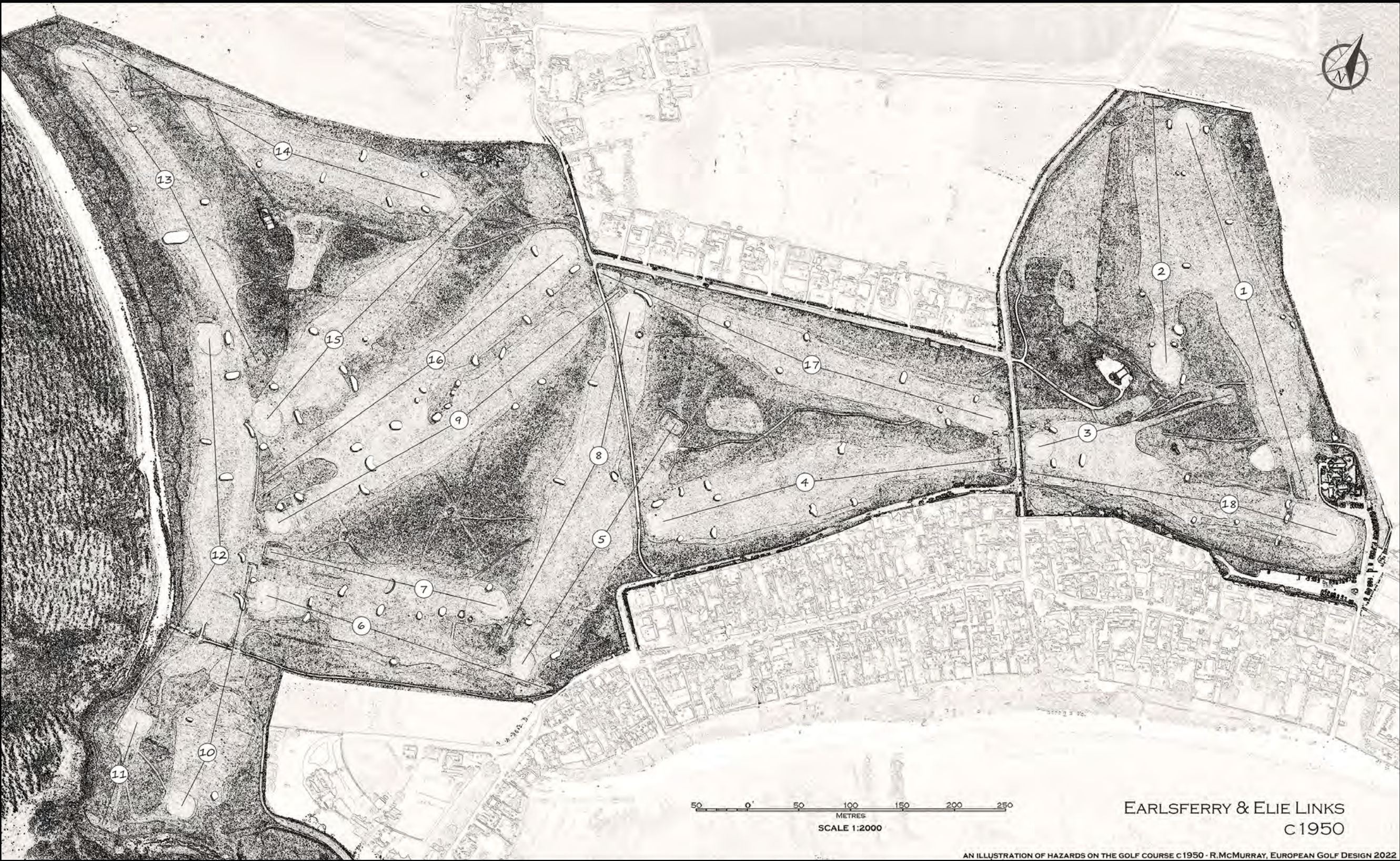
Overall, however, the bunkering does not play a hugely significant part in the strategic challenge of the golf course for better players. Because of the increased distance the ball is now traveling, many of the fairway bunkers are not far enough from the tee to influence the way longer hitters play the hole. Instead the bunkering tends to impact more on the shorter hitters and higher handicap players. Examples of this can be found at holes such as the 1st, 8th, 13th, 14th, 16th and 17th. Even the bunkering on the 4th and 9th can be easily passed by the longer hitters on a calm day. Obviously wind conditions can affect how much the bunkering comes into play, but it is probably time to review bunker locations with the aim of improving the strategic test for category one players.

Whilst some new bunkering may be necessary, there are also bunkers that could be removed, precisely because they only penalise shorter hitters. However, any changes to the bunkering needs to be done sympathetically and in a way which does not adversely affect the character of the golf course and the very thing that makes the Earlsferry & Elie Links so popular.

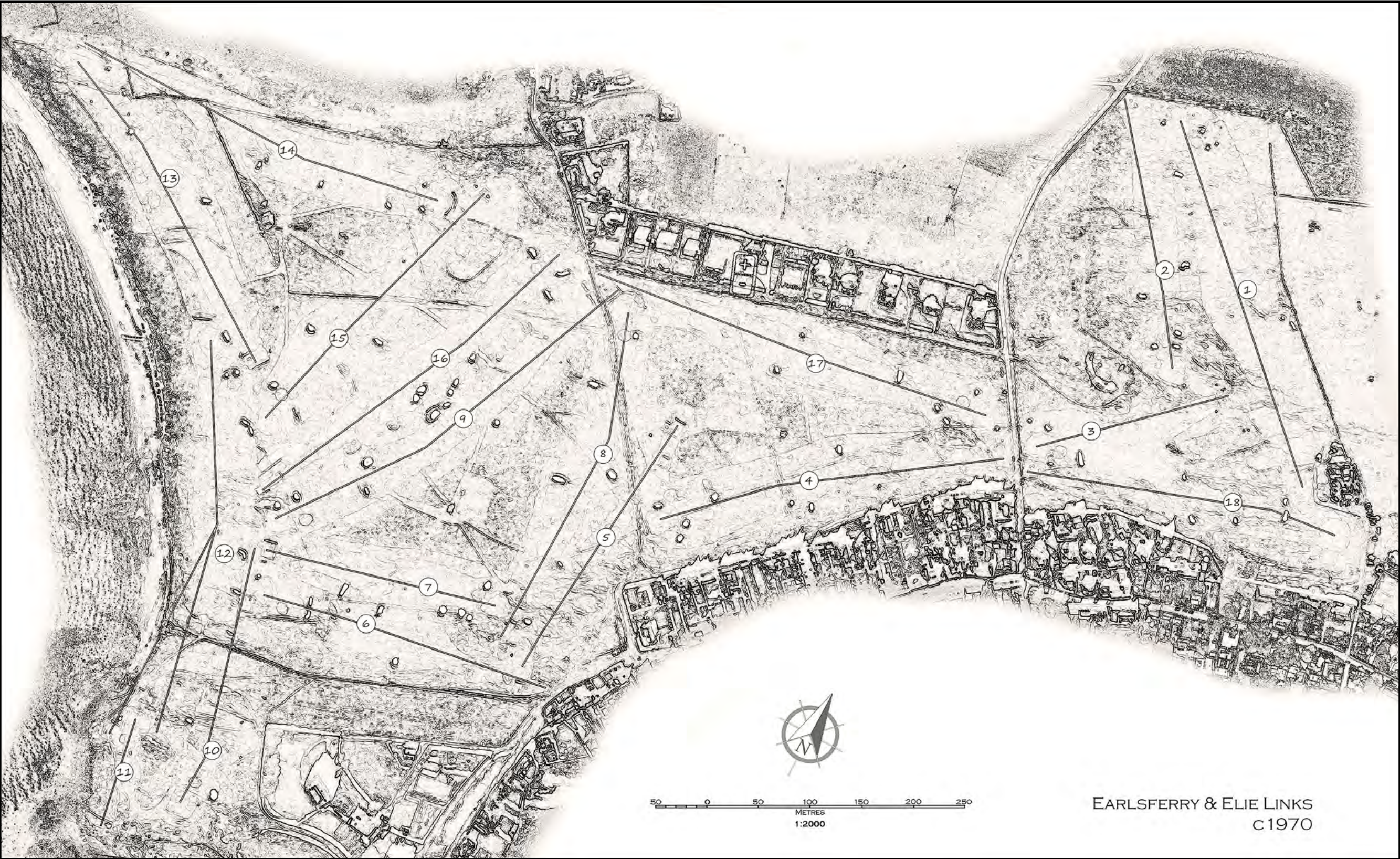
Suggestions on the placement and removal of bunkers are contained in the hole-by-hole design proposals.



13th hole



Plan showing the golf course layout and bunkering c1950

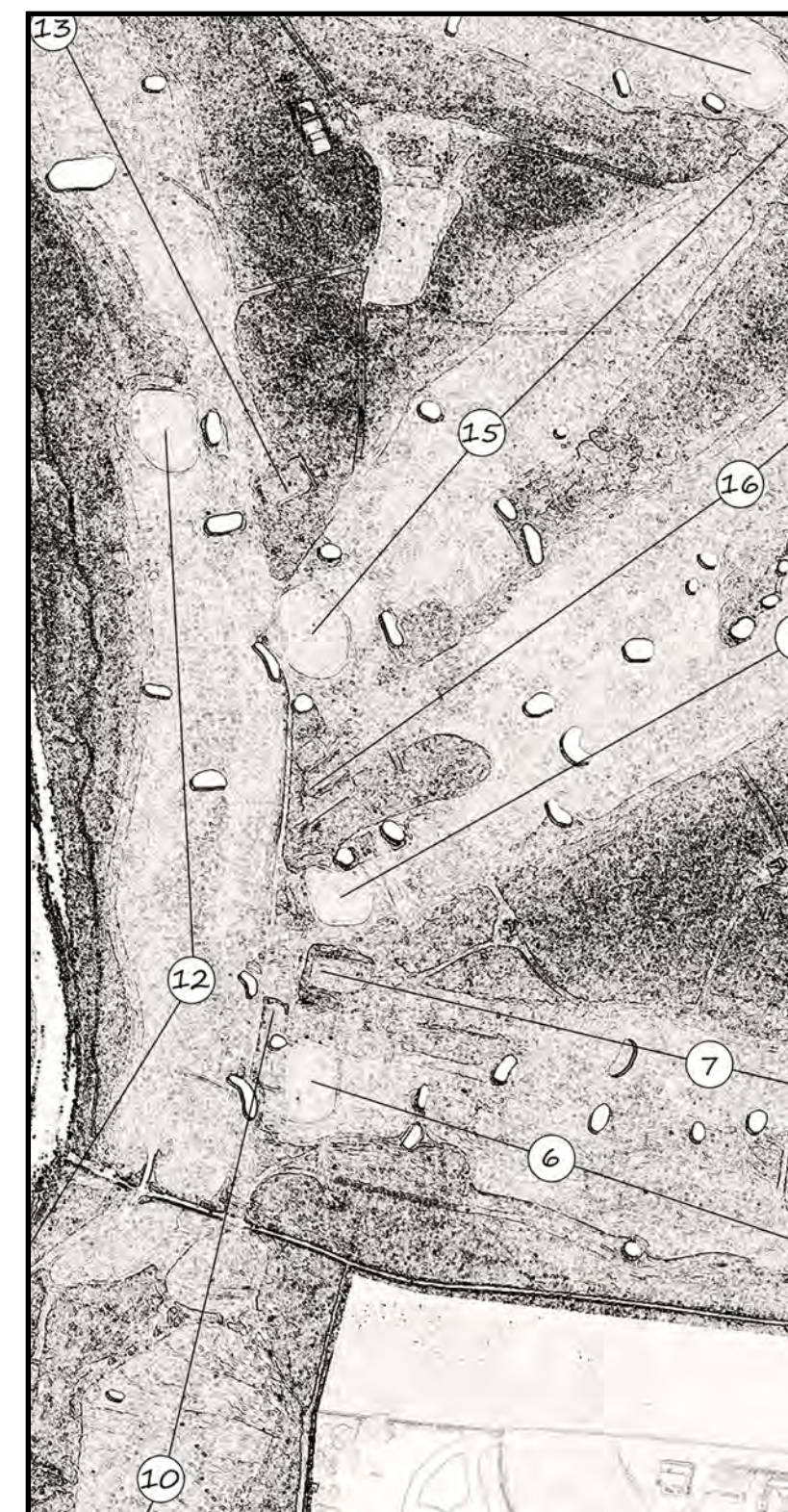


Plan showing the golf course layout and bunkering c1970

There have been some significant changes to the bunkering on the golf course over the last 75 years. In the early 1950s there were 102 bunkers and the shape and size of the bunkering varied considerably, certainly much more than the style in evidence today.

Generally bunkers were larger and the shapes less uniform. Some had steeply revetted faces and others less severe grass faces. The bunkers on the holes closest to the Firth of Forth appear to have had steeper faces and a more natural, rugged quality than some of the bunkering on the inland holes.

Before 1973 a number of bunkers were removed, notably on the 4th, 12th, 13th 15th and 16th holes. This was no doubt due to a combination of playability and maintenance factors. It is particularly noticeable how bunkers close to the shoreline have either been reduced in size or filled in, suggesting that wind blow and sand loss were particular problems.



Bunkering on the 9th, 12th, 15th and 16th holes, 1950



Bunkering on the 9th, 12th, 15th and 16th holes in 2018 - note similarity of bunker sizes and shapes on this image, compared to 1950



Golf strategy on the 4th hole c1950

Much wider fairways was another characteristic of the immediate post-war golf course and this is clearly evident on holes such as the 4th, where the bunkering presented a clear strategic challenge, allowing golfers of different abilities alternative ways to plot a way to the green.

By the mid-1970s the bunker layout was substantially as it is today. Although there have been occasional additions and removals since this time the main alterations have been cosmetic. In the last few years there appears to have been a drive to regulate the style of the bunkering and either consciously or not, the size and style of the bunkers have become very similar. Generally they have become smaller and rounder, in the style of most other links courses. The previous variations in appearance have been lost, along, perhaps, with some of the course's original character.



Golf course bunkering in 1950

The way the bunker styles have changed is clearly illustrated by the alterations to those on the approach to the 18th green. In the 1950s the bunkers were relatively shallow with softer, grass faces and the sand gently flashed up. There was then a period when the bunkers were made deeper and more penal, with steeper grass faces and the sand sitting quite flat in the base. Perhaps this was done to make these bunkers more in keeping with bunkers elsewhere on the course.

Most recently the bunkers have been constructed with revetted, almost vertical faces and the area of the sand has been markedly reduced. The bunker bases are still very flat, making it common for golf balls to come to rest against the steep turf wall.

Virtually all the bunkers on the course are now revetted and many are in need of reconstruction. With labour time and turf requirements, it is perhaps no surprise that bunkers can get progressively smaller after each reconstruction. These changes might even be imperceptible at first, but as time goes on they can lead to quite dramatic changes in course character. It is recommended that future bunker reconstruction is carefully considered and a plan produced to begin to restore some bunkers closer to their original size and shape. The steepness of the bunker faces should also be reconsidered and their angle softened to improve stability and make them more playable.



Allan Cash Picture Library/Alamy Stock Photo

c1950



c2015



2020

In addition, the bunker bases should be bowled out to assist in allowing golf balls to roll away from the faces. This issue is compounded because the small sand area makes it difficult to leave enough room for the edges to be flashed up. The exclusive use of revetting might also be reviewed. Grass faced bunkers were common on this course and where bunkers sit into existing mounds or higher ground, and especially where the faces are in shade, then grass faces might be more appropriate. Perhaps, also, on holes further from the sea. Revetted bunkers should still be the dominant style however.

2.3 Greens

Greens sizes are mostly on the large side and there is a good combination of well contoured and relatively flatter putting surfaces. There are very few sudden changes in gradient though and most of the slopes are relatively long, something which the generous sizes of most greens can generally accommodate.

Even so, some greens still have a limited number of hole positions because of the degree of slope, notably at the 3rd, 5th, 6th and 10th. Without major reshaping of the putting surfaces it will be difficult to create more space for hole positions, but the problem may well not be so much of an issue to warrant this kind of work. The 5th green could be extended by mowing out the front right section a little wider to potentially create more hole locations in that area.

The approximate total area for the greens on the course is 11,295m². The largest green is the 18th at around 975m² and the smallest the 9th at 435m². Comparing photographs from the 1950's and 1970's it is clear that generally the green surfaces are larger today than ever before.

The only greens which appear to have changed markedly are the 11th and the 14th, which were both rebuilt some thirty years ago. The 11th green was moved to the north and extended over the old 12th tee, no doubt to increase the number of hole locations as there were very few on the original sloping green. It was an awkward area to extend the green and, whilst it achieved its primary objective of providing a somewhat flatter green, it has never fitted naturally into the space, partly because of the way the new shaping tied into the surrounds, especially at the back of the green.

Green	M²		Green	M²
1	565		10	525
2	790		11	455
3	550		12	650
4	610		13	655
5	520		14	650
6	605		15	710
7	565		16	650
8	805		17	580
9	435		18	975
Front 9	5445		Back 9	5850
			Total	11295



13th green



In addition, the old tee which remains on the right side of the green is something of an eyesore and ideally should be removed. The space between the green and the 12th tee could then be developed, either with longer rough, to make chipping across the green more difficult, or even with a new bunker.

The 14th green surface was raised, presumably to make it more visible from the fairway, and a long, low mound behind the green, which separated the green from the 15th tees, was removed. The green itself is perfectly fine (although not the most interesting in terms of shape), but the lack of containment and rather perfunctory drop off at the back of the green could be reshaped to improve the setting, potentially as part of a scheme of improvements to the 15th tees.

The area of the practice green is around 400m², which is very small. Normally we would design practice putting greens to be at least twice this size to help spread wear. Whilst there is space for expansion in its current location, there are potential issues with drives off the 18th medal tee, which would make it difficult to design safely. The green could possibly be moved more to the north and west, on to steeper land, but this would require a fair degree of earth movement.

2.4 Tees

Unlike the greens which are relatively large, the tees are surprisingly small, measuring only 5,955m² in total. This amounts to an average area of only 330m² teeing space per hole, which is low. If possible, 500m² is typically the minimum teeing space we like to provide.

Our recommendation would be to add teeing space throughout the course, wherever it is appropriate and practical and, importantly, safe.

As mentioned previously, there are few options for adding back tees, with the exception of at the 15th. However, there is much more scope for additional forward tees to create a shorter golf course for those who want it and to provide opportunities to spread the wear away from the main teeing areas during the winter. In this age of golfers hitting the ball further, it is interesting to note that many golf clubs are now asking for more forward tees, particularly to enable seniors and ladies to continue enjoying their golf for longer.



11th green

Tees	M ²	Tees	M ²
1	450	10	450
2	300	11	365
3	350	12	220
4	400	13	285
5	370	14	220
6	335	15	400
7	290	16	460
8	240	17	285
9	250	18	285
Front 9	2985	Back 9	2970
		Total	5955

Teeing space could be increased a little by adjusting the mowing pattern on the tees to a more rectangular style. Mowing time would be increased but it would improve the visual quality of the tees and match the grass cutting lines to the rectangular shape of the tee platforms. The present mowing pattern with rounded edges looks odd.



Changes to mowing style on 18 tees - Top images 2022, Bottom images 2009



Former rectangular mowing on 4th tees 2009



Rounded mowing pattern on 10th tees



2.5 Fairways

There appear to be few issues with fairways. The widths are reasonably wide, although much narrower than at the turn of the last century, when the course had more bunkers and golfers had to take a more strategic approach to avoiding the hazards.

Achieving a balance between playability, protection of the strategic design intent, maintenance requirements and preserving the course rating can be difficult, but the right balance appears to have been struck with the layout in its present form.



13th fairway

2.6 Paths

One item that is definitely worth addressing are the state of the pathways at the 2nd and 17th tees.

Neatly presented elements such as paths, walls, signage and course furniture can make a real difference to how a golf course is perceived. At the 2nd tees the worn path and plastic reinforcement mesh are something of an eyesore. A properly constructed, edged gravel or crushed stone pathway would look neater and help to better present the tee complex generally.

At the 17th the path could be widened slightly to give more room for golf buggies and trolleys and the landscaping around the bench improved to make a much more visually appealing feature.

We would also recommend that a proper path is installed on the 3rd hole to allow safer access to the women's tees from the 2nd green. This would also have the benefit of moving people away from the 2nd whilst waiting on that tee. Details are described in the hole by hole recommendations of this report.



Path at 2nd tees



Path at 17th tees



Proposal for path at 2nd tee

2.7 Golf Course Safety

Safety on and around golf courses is becoming a more important factor for golf clubs and particularly on those golf courses laid out prior to the use of modern safety standards. Many older courses were designed with fairly minimal safety margins, both between golf holes and adjoining properties, and are now being forced to make changes to golf holes, often negatively, to reduce conflict and risk.

Safety margins for golf holes vary according to the risk and the direction of play. Typically the minimum appropriate distance, both between golf hole centre lines and property boundaries, is 60 metres, measured perpendicular to the play line. However, with regard to adjoining property, this distance can increase, depending on the land use and the degree of risk. For instance, alongside a busy road the acceptable safety margin distance may increase to 100 metres.

In addition, local factors also need to be taken on board when assessing safety, such as topography, wind direction and elevation, all of which can play a part in either increasing or decreasing the element of risk.

There are few official guidelines as to what constitutes the safe design of golf courses. The European Institute of Golf Course Architects did provide some broad information to their members following a study into golf course safety in 2002, but nothing was officially published.

In 2021 The R&A released an Analysis of Amateur Driving Data 1996 to 2018 which examined not just the driving distance of golfers in each of the four main handicap categories, but also the dispersion.

As well as telling us that the maximum mean driving distance for category 1 players was measured at 252 yards, the study found that 90% of drives for all handicap categories land within 40 yards either side of the median (aiming point). In other words, only about 10% of shots fell outside 10 degrees of the median.

Of course, golfers are perfectly capable of hitting shots wider than 40 yards off line, even if it is only very occasionally, and elements such as wind and elevation can accentuate the distance a golf ball will travel away from its intended target. As golf course designers we have learned through experience to make appropriate recommendations for safety depending on all given factors.

It should be understood that it is not possible to make golf courses 100% safe. It is, however, possible to minimise any risks through good design, although, in some cases on existing courses, it is not always possible to attain the ideal in terms of safety without making such substantial changes that the location of some golf holes are no longer viable. In this case the golf club may want to look at making whatever changes are required to reduce conflict in as practical a way as possible.

Looking at safety issues caused by golf there are a number of areas around the course at Elie which we feel should be highlighted. These include those between golfers on different holes and also between golfers and neighboring land users.

An already identified priority is the need to find a solution to the problem of balls driven from the 4th tee striking parked cars on Links Road. However, any assessment of safety on the course will also highlight issues elsewhere for which plans may need to be put in place to mitigate these other risks.

Our Safety Hotspot Plan clearly identifies areas of potential safety conflict both on and around the course. To resolve all these issues using modern safety margins would result in wholesale changes to the course and it would become unrecognizable to the course today. For instance, moving greens and tees away from the safety corridor on the 12th would require the redesign and substantial shortening of four or five holes alone.

However, there are options available to relieve some of these conflicts, especially where there is space available within the course for moving fairways. Notably it will be possible to realign the 4th and 17th holes away from roads and houses.

Safety concerns at the 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th have long been recognised at Elie but potential solutions have all been reviewed and discarded. Proposals have included moving the 6th green well to the left and shortening the 10th to a par 3, and a suggestion from James Braid in 1948 to make the 7th a much longer par 4 and the 8th a par 3. In 1954 a net was even considered to protect players on the 10th tee from the danger of balls struck from the 12th tee. It is likely that the safety problems on the 10th were improved by the redeveloped 12th tee complex when it was moved to the right side of the 11th green. This probably helped to realign the direction of tee shots further to the left.

The main safety issues we have identified are illustrated on this Safety Hotspot Plan.

Areas shaded in red show potential conflict with adjoining landowners, houses, roads, paths and so on.

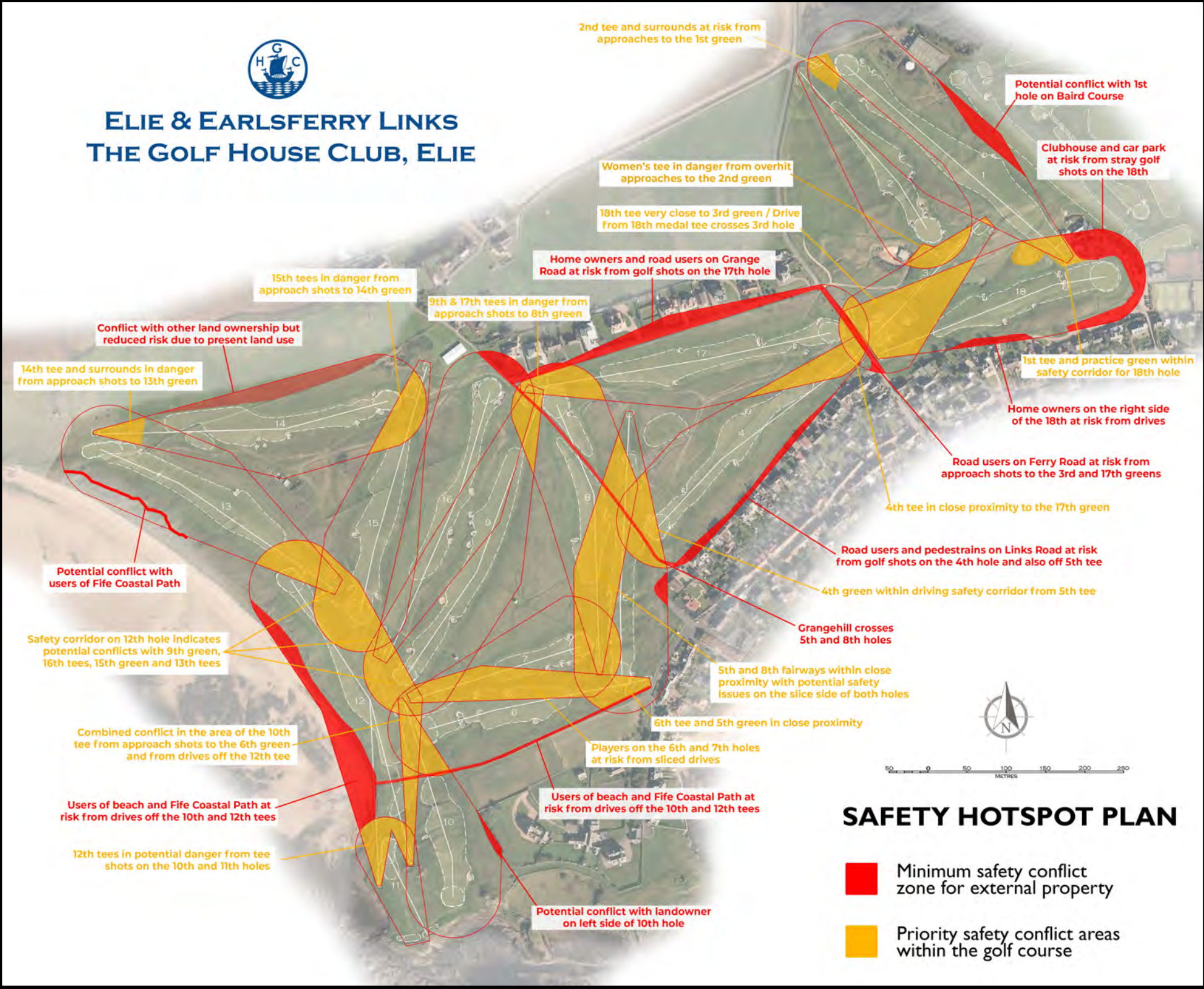
Areas shaded in yellow identify safety issues within the golf course between golf holes.

The red zones should be seen as the priority areas for attention in order to reduce safety problems with property and land users outside the golf course.

Clearly the problems with cars being damaged by golf balls on the left side of the 4th hole is an issue which needs to be addressed as a priority. It is fortunate that there is space to the right of this hole to allow the fairway to be angled away from the property line. Recommendations for the redesign of this hole are presented in the Hole by Hole Design Proposals section.

Should a similar safety issue become apparent on the left side of the 17th hole then, like the 4th, this should be relatively easy to resolve.

An area of concern that the club may wish to consider would be safety problems outside of the golf course on the right of the 18th hole. While no problems have been reported by the club, solutions in this area would be very difficult to find without seriously compromising the golf hole, or major intervention such as netting to alleviate the issue.)



This plan indicates the kind of changes to the golf course that would be required to satisfy some of the internal and external safety problems. It includes the realignment of some holes. The changes shown indicate the priorities highlighted by the Golf Club following the feedback received following our preliminary report.

The course adjustments include:

- 1) Realigning the 4th hole to the right, away from Links Road
- 2) Moving the 8th fairway to the left, away from the 5th hole
- 3) Realigning the 17th fairway to the right, away from Grange Road

Whilst we would not expect the golf club to sanction radical changes to the course, we do feel that it is important that the club understands the potential issues involved. As golf course architects we have a responsibility to ensure that our designs are safe and that they follow industry standards, but sometimes the recommendations we put forward can make for uncomfortable reading.

Safety on the golf course is an important subject which needs to be regularly reviewed so plans can be made to help mitigate future problems. That mitigation could include wholesale redesign of golf holes, fairly minor adjustments to some golf features, or it might involve improved signage and course control.





Appropriate signage to warn golfers of potential conflicts, especially where the course plays close to pathways and roads used by non-golfers, is important. Equally, golfers should be warned about potential safety issues on the golf course where these are known but may not be obvious, especially to visitors. The judgement in the case Phee v. Gordon and Niddry Castle Golf Club may be of interest in this regard.

Some of the changes, that have been illustrated, such as realigning the 4th hole, moving the 8th fairway away from the 5th and changing the 17th, could all be done relatively easily and without deeply harming the character of the existing golf course.

Other possible alterations, such as moving the 5th green and making the 7th hole a par 3, would be much more fundamental changes and could risk harming the character and history of the course. Decisions on course adjustments here, as elsewhere, need to be balanced against the degree and frequency of the risk posed by golfers on adjoining holes. More information is provided on these recommendations in the Hole by Hole Design Proposals section.

3. Golf Course Proposals

The recommendations for future development fall into three main categories;

- 1) Improvements to golf course strategy and playability
- 2) Improvements to bunkers
- 3) Improvements to golf course safety

The proposals for each hole on the Earlsferry & Elie Links are laid out on the following pages, but the following are the main recommendations;

- Adjust the design of the 4th by moving the play line away from the Links Road
- Move the 8th fairway to the left to improve safety between that and the 5th hole
- Consider adjusting the alignment of the 17th hole to reduce potential safety problems with adjoining home owners on the left side of the hole
- Adjust alignment of the 18th hole to the left to move the line of play away from homes
- Improve safety between other golf holes
- Improve signage for golfers
- Add new forward tees throughout the course where feasible
- Reshape bunkers to ensure the bases are bowled out and to restore some of their original sizes and shapes
- Improve pathways on the course

The changes outlined would only add approximately 30 yards to the length of the golf course when compared to the card (all at the 15th). However, new yellow tee platforms at the 5th and 15th would add 70 yards to the length of the yellow course.

The new forward tees would reduce the minimum length of the course to approximately 5,478 yards. The scorecard shown illustrates the new hole lengths. There were occasional discrepancies with measurements on some holes when comparing the scorecard to our measurements from Google Earth. For the purposes of this exercise we have presumed that the scorecard measurements are correct.

HOLE	NAME	WHITE	YELLOW	GREEN	PAR	STROKE INDEX	RED	PAR	STROKE INDEX
1	STACKS	420	406	397	4	10	400	5	11
2	HIGH HOLE	284	284	267	4	16	282	4	7
3	WICKETS	214	204	137	3	4	148	3	17
4	PROVOST	378	372	367	4	8	367	4	1
5	DOCTOR	365	340	259	4	14	259	4	15
6	QUARRIES	316	306	284	4	6	310	4	9
7	PEGGY'S	252	241	230	4	18	217	3	13
8	NEUK	382	370	338	4	12	345	4	3
9	MARTINS BAY	440	432	412	4	2	433	5	6
OUT		3051	2955	2691	35		2761	36	

HOLE	NAME	WHITE	YELLOW	GREEN	PAR	STROKE INDEX	RED	PAR	STROKE INDEX
10	LUNDAR LAW	288	278	225	4	17	239	4	16
11	SEA HOLE	131	131	122	3	15	133	3	18
12	BENTS	466	436	415	4	1	415	5	5
13	CROUPIE	380	371	336	4	9	355	4	2
14	SUCKIELEA	414	402	352	4	5	391	4	8
15	COALHILL	368	338	282	4	13	321	4	14
16	GRANGE	407	397	366	4	7	373	4	4
17	FERRY	439	434	364	4	3	433	5	12
18	HOME	359	337	325	4	11	347	4	10
IN		3252	3124	2787	35		3007	37	
TOTAL		6303	6079	5478	70		5768	73	

A revised Stroke Index is indicated for the men's course on the scorecard above. The allocation follows the original recommendations for Handicap Stroke Index developed by CONGU.

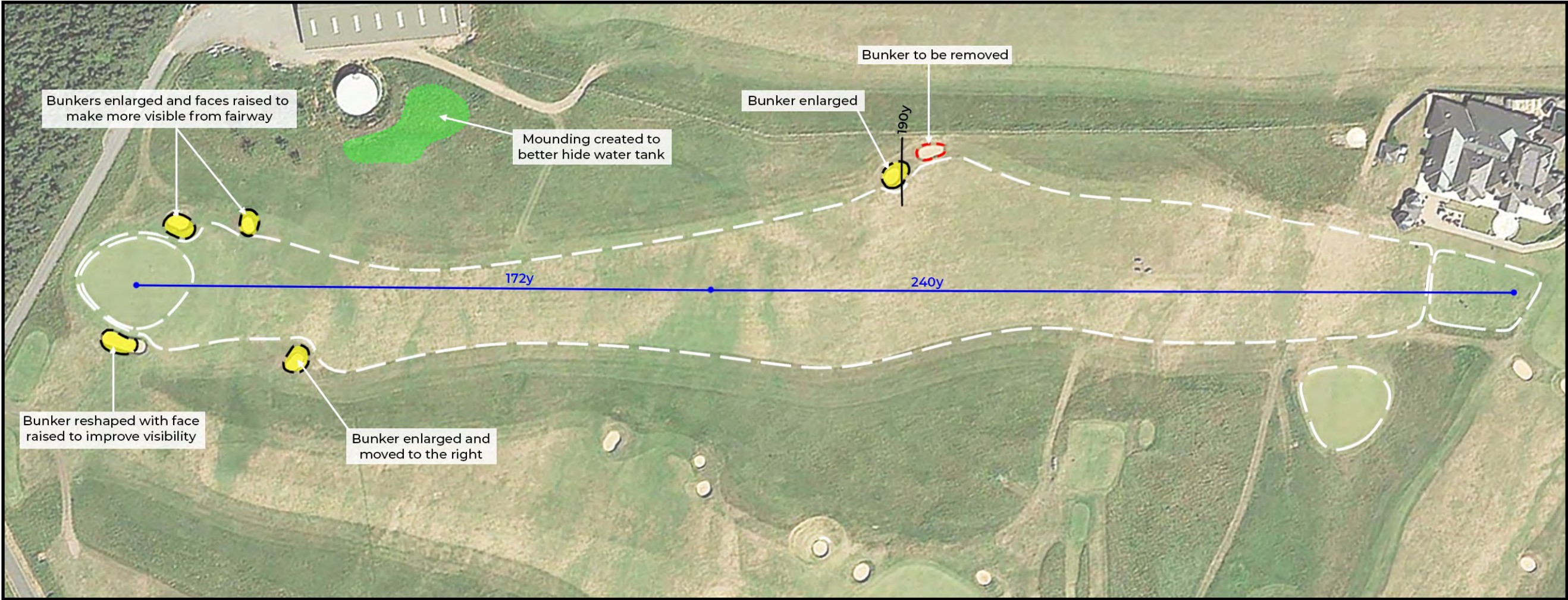
We believe that the recommendations listed on the following pages would lead to an improved golf course for playability, overall challenge, aesthetics and, importantly, safety.



3.1 Hole by Hole Design Proposals

420y 406y Par 4 400 Par 5

Hole 1



With its setting immediately outside the clubhouse and the starter's periscope, the 1st tee at Elie is one of the most memorable in golf, despite the fact that the drive is completely blind! This is a good opening hole, relatively long but fairly straight forward, as long as the drive stays in bounds.

The large tee has a pronounced uphill slope, which is also unusual, but no doubt enables golfers to get their ball into the air and over the hill in front. The top of the hill is steep and some of the slopes will present difficulties for mowing, especially at fairway height. Lowering the top of the hill would help to reduce the slope angle, but it is likely that this will involve rock removal and may spoil the outlook from the tee. An alternative could be to mow the steepest parts of the hill at a higher height of cut especially during winter.

The bunkers on the right of the fairway are set at around 190 yards (174m) from the back of the tee and rarely come into play for the better golfer. They are much more likely to be a hazard for higher handicappers. It seems unnecessary to have two bunkers in this area so our recommendation is that the first bunker is removed while the second bunker could be enlarged to fill the space a little better.

The three greenside bunkers are difficult to see from the fairway and could be reshaped with higher faces to make them more visible. The two bunkers on the right of the green are also very small and would benefit from being made larger, again to increase their visual impact.

To tie in with the development of the bunkers on the right of the green, we would recommend that the left side fairway bunker is extended to the right so that it has more influence on the approach shot, helping to bring the right side bunkers more into play.

Lastly it would benefit the aesthetics of the golf hole if the water tank could be hidden better with mounding.



1st tee



Small greenside bunkers



Existing 1st green approach

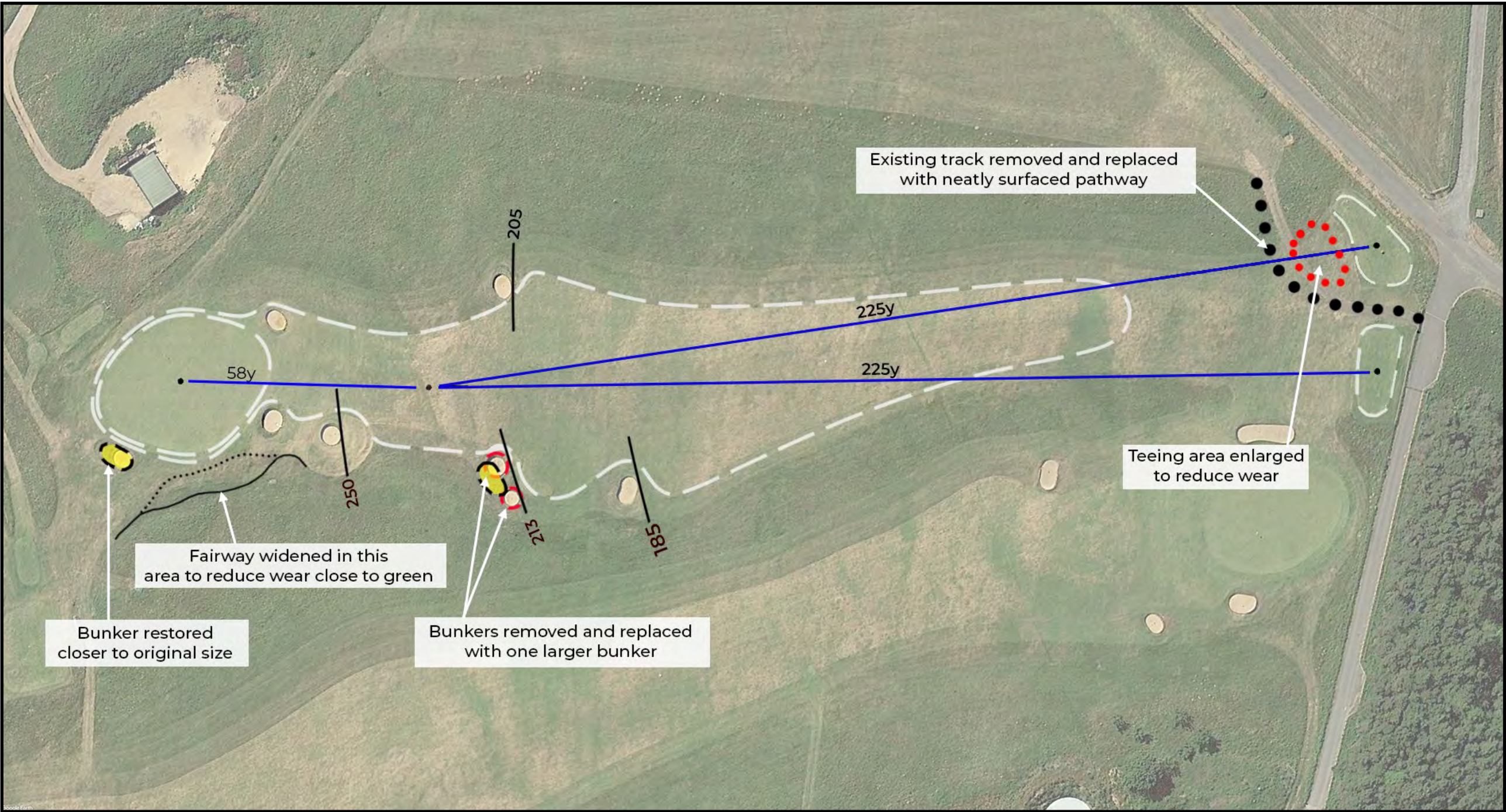


Proposed 1st green approach



Hole 2

284y 284y 300y Par 4



Hole 2 Design Proposals

The 2nd hole is a great short par 4. It provides an early birdie opportunity, but it's well bunkered green approach means that the drive has to be carefully thought through and well executed to avoid trouble.

The teeing area on this hole is relatively small at about 300m² and would benefit from being increased in size. We would recommend the right side tee platform as the most appropriate for expansion, although this would require most earthworks.

The need for improvements to the maintenance path have been discussed earlier in this report in **2.6 Paths**.

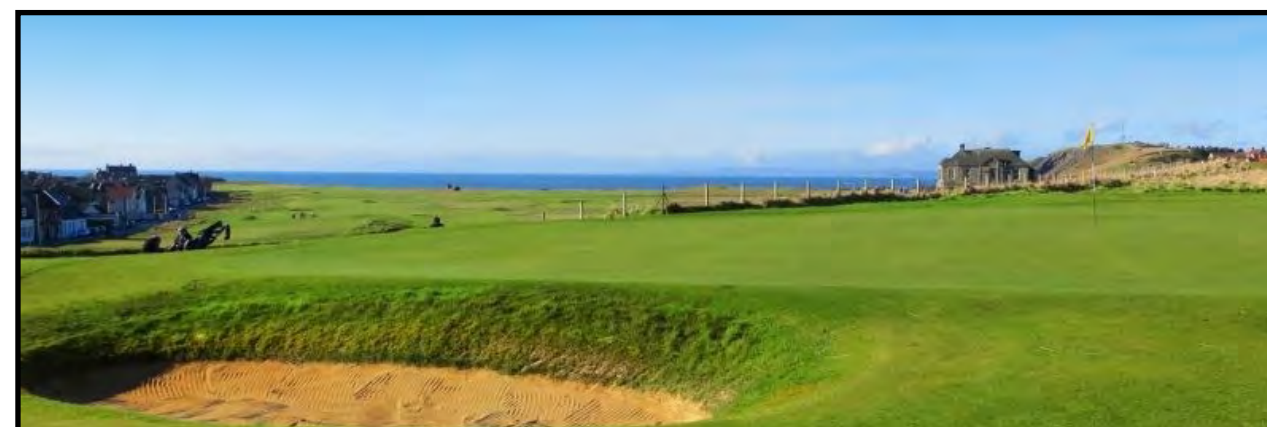
The bunkers on the left side of the fairway at around 213 yards (195m) have changed often since the first bunker was placed in this location in the 1990s and it still doesn't seem that they are quite right. The left side bunker is a pretty poor specimen which has no real association with its surrounds. Our recommendation is to remove this bunker and increase the size of the bunker on the right, which would also benefit from being rebuilt to fit better into the mound it sits within.

The size of all the greenside bunkers on this hole could be made a little larger with less steep faces and the bases bowled out more to allow balls to run down away from the bunker edges. The back left greenside bunker especially could be restored closer to its original shape and size.

To reduce wear on the left side of the green, approaching the 3rd tee, we suggest that the rough is cut back to create a wider walk through area. This should help to spread wear. It would be helpful in this regard if this area also receives suitable irrigation coverage.



Existing left side fairway bunkers



Former shape of back bunker at 2nd green

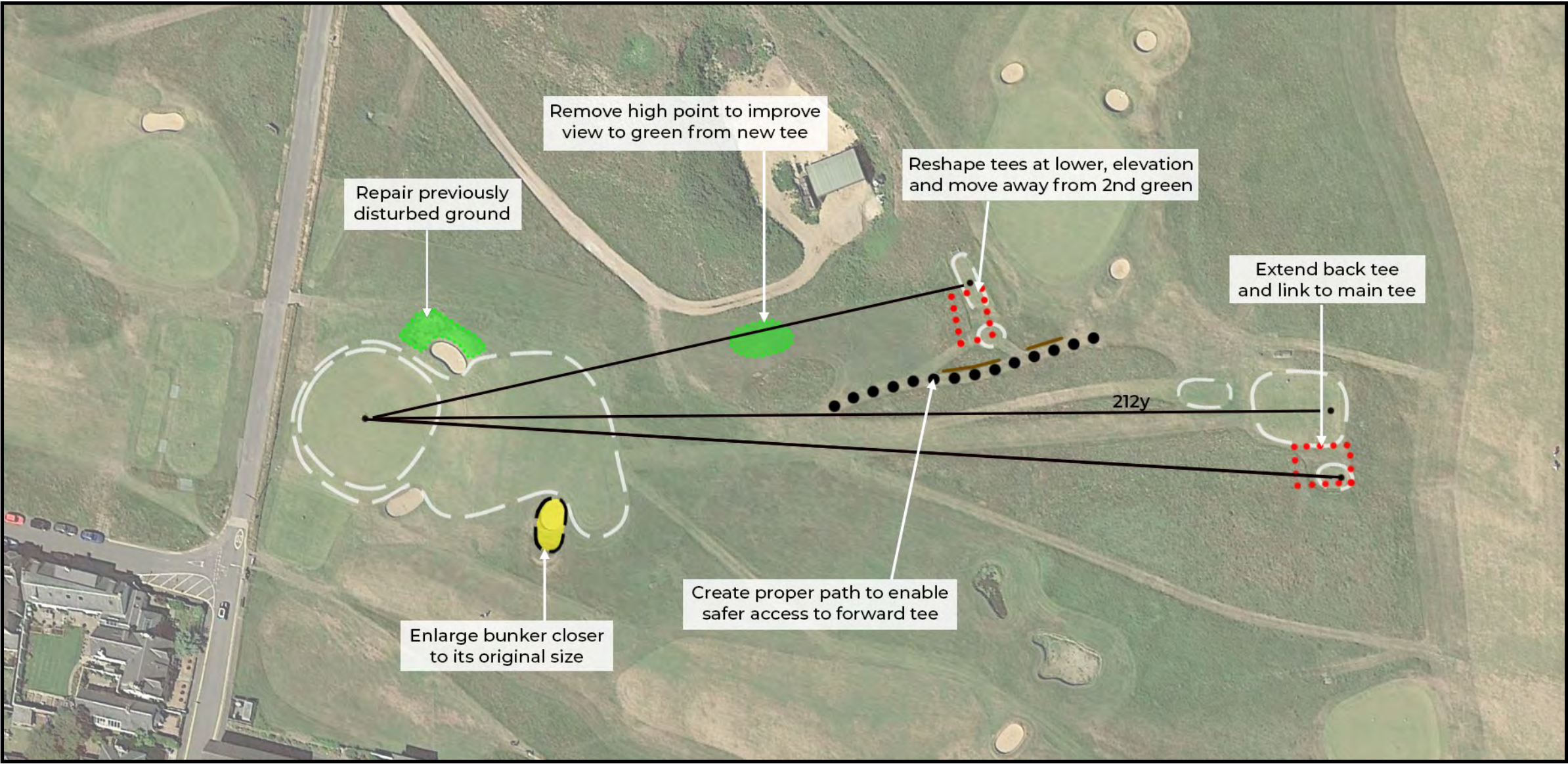


Present shape of back bunker at 2nd green



Hole 3

214y 204y 148y Par 3





Hole 3 Design Proposals

The 3rd is a really challenging par 3, especially as it generally plays into the prevailing wind. Most of the recommendations on this hole involve the tees. The small medal tee really feels like a bit of an after-thought and would be improved if it was extended, raised slightly and merged with the main teeing area.

The forward tee used by women has a number of issues. Firstly, it is located very close to the 2nd green and can't be seen by golfers hitting their approaches on the 2nd hole. Secondly, it is very small.

Ideally this front tee should be removed completely and a new forward tee constructed away from the 2nd green. Unfortunately there appears to be no other suitable alternative location because of the topography in this area. The only option would be for women to use the front section of the main teeing area.

If it is determined that the tee should remain in its present area then we would suggest that the tee is rebuilt at the level of the lower tee and extended forward. The right half of the current tee could be taken out of play to move golfers further away from the 2nd green.

One of the other issues with this front tee is the difficulty of accessing the tee from the 2nd green, down a steep slope, and then from the tee to the path to the 3rd fairway. It would be helpful to provide a dedicated path to the tee, starting from behind the left side of the 2nd green. This would need to be cut into the hillside and levelled as necessary. Rough could be grown up on the right side of the 2nd green, both to discourage golfers from accessing the 3rd tee from this side and also to prevent balls rolling over the green and on to the tee.



3rd hole with large approach bunker on left



3rd hole today with much smaller approach bunker

With the proposed lowering of the front tee there would be a need to take some of the height of the high mound in front of the tee to improve vision to the 3rd green. This might also provide a useful location for a source of material to rebuild this tee.

This hole is a good illustration of how recent bunker works have changed the visual character of the hole. The approach bunker on the left of the fairway had formerly been a fairly large, grass faced bunker, but it has now been changed to a much smaller revetted bunker of a similar size and character to the other bunkers on this hole and indeed the rest of the course. Our suggestion is that this bunker should be restored to something closer to its original size, as part of an overall scheme to reinstate some of the original characteristics of the golf course.

In doing any works on the golf course it is important that the work is done carefully and in such a way that no long term scars are left behind. In many areas where renovation work has taken place on the course previously the ground conditions have struggled to return to their original condition. This may be due to factors such as compaction or lack of topsoil. The bunker on the right of the green is a typical example, where poor turf quality is clearly evident as a result of the reshaping of this area some years ago.



Poor turf quality where ground has been disturbed

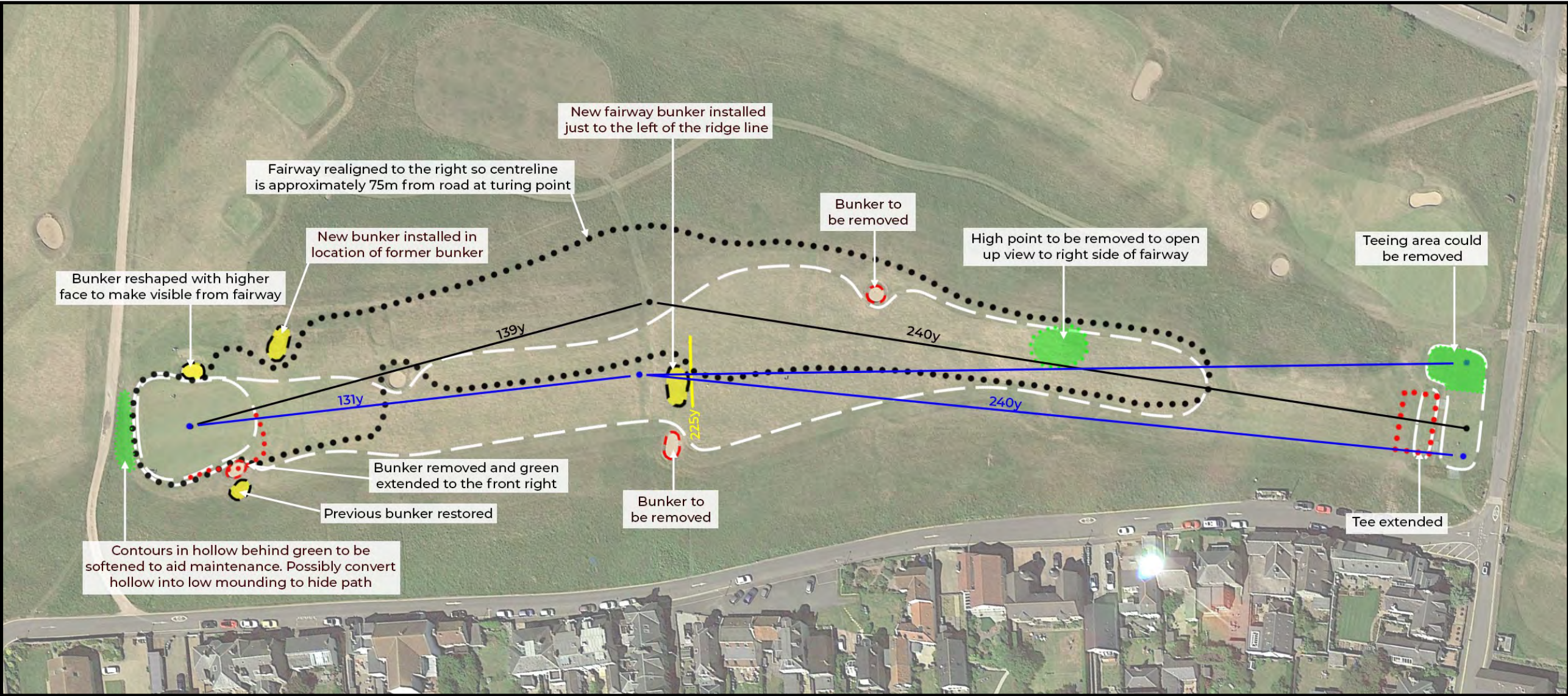


Existing front tee located close to 2nd green



Hole 4

378y 372y 367y Par 4



Hole 4 Design Proposals

The 4th is a great strategic golf hole which cleverly uses a natural ridge line which runs down the centre of the fairway and green to determine the best position for the drive depending on the hole location. In previous times this hole was much more heavily bunkered and the fairway was much wider.

Unfortunately, with the problems of damage to cars from errant drives, the need to adjust the layout of this golf hole has become a priority. With space to the right it is possible to move the fairway away from the road, but some excavation of the contours in front of the tee will be required to open up a view to the realigned fairway.

The proposals for the redesign of this hole include moving the centreline of the fairway to a point on the right edge of the current fairway. This would increase the angle of the right to left dog-leg and slightly lengthen the hole.

At the dog-leg point the centre of the fairway would be approximately 75 metres from the road, compared to 55 metres at present.

The fairway bunker on the left side is moved to the right to a spot close to the ridge line, helping to visually push the driving line further to the right. To help with this the high ground in front of the tee will need to be reshaped and lowered to allow a view to the fairway from the tee. The fairway bunker on the right side should be removed.

The section of the tee closest to the 17th green could be closed to ensure the maximum driving angle away from the road and to reduce a safety conflict in this area. To compensate for the loss of teeing space the tee platform could be extended at the front, increasing the size of the lower tee.

With the new alignment the direction of the approach into the green will change. As such we recommend that the bunkering at the green is adjusted to suit the revised design of the fairway. This would involve restoring a former bunker on the right, just short of the green, and adjusting the right greenside bunker so that it is reshaped with a higher face that can be seen from the fairway.

In addition, the shot from the fairway into a left side hole location will now be much tougher, coming in at an angle across the ridge line into a very narrow section of green. To open up the entrance into this side of the green the left greenside bunker could be moved further to the left (close to where this bunker was originally positioned) allowing the putting surface to be extended in this area.

Lastly, the hollow immediately behind the green is difficult to maintain at fairway height because of the sudden change in slope angle off the green. The contours here could be softened to make maintenance easier. Alternatively, this area could be reshaped with low mounds and maintained as rough to prevent balls running through the green and onto the Grangehill track, or 5th fairway.



Front tee could be extended to increase playing area



Present alignment of the 4th hole



Proposed realignment of 4th hole showing new fairway bunker and adjustments to high ground in front of tee



Present 4th fairway from the green



Proposed 4th fairway from the green



Existing 4th green approach



Proposed 4th green approach



Hole 5

365y 305y 259y Par 4



Hole 5 Design Proposals

This is a really fun par 4 with a fantastically undulating fairway and a tricky, sloping green. There are only a few recommendations for improvements.

The first is to add a new tee for regular play. With the increased distance golfers are hitting the ball there is more chance of players trying to reach the green with their tee shot, especially from the current tee. We suggest that a new tee is built some 30 metres further back, lengthening the hole to 335 yards from the yellow tee markers. Combined with the other proposals for the 8th fairway this would improve safety between these two holes.

The existing small tee on the right of the regular tee could be removed.

At the green the ground on the left side could be levelled out and established as fairway to improve the walk through area to the 6th tees. At present the rugged ground here means that all the wear is close to the green and around the bunker.

The 5th has one of the green which struggles for suitable hole locations. By mowing out the green slightly further on the right side it may be possible to gain an additional hole location in this area.

The location of the 6th tees so close to the 5th green is a concern in terms of safety. The only remedy would be to move the 5th green 25 metres or so back towards the top of the rise in front of the green and slightly to the left, away from the 8th tees. Any conflict here should be monitored to help determine future priorities for change in this area.

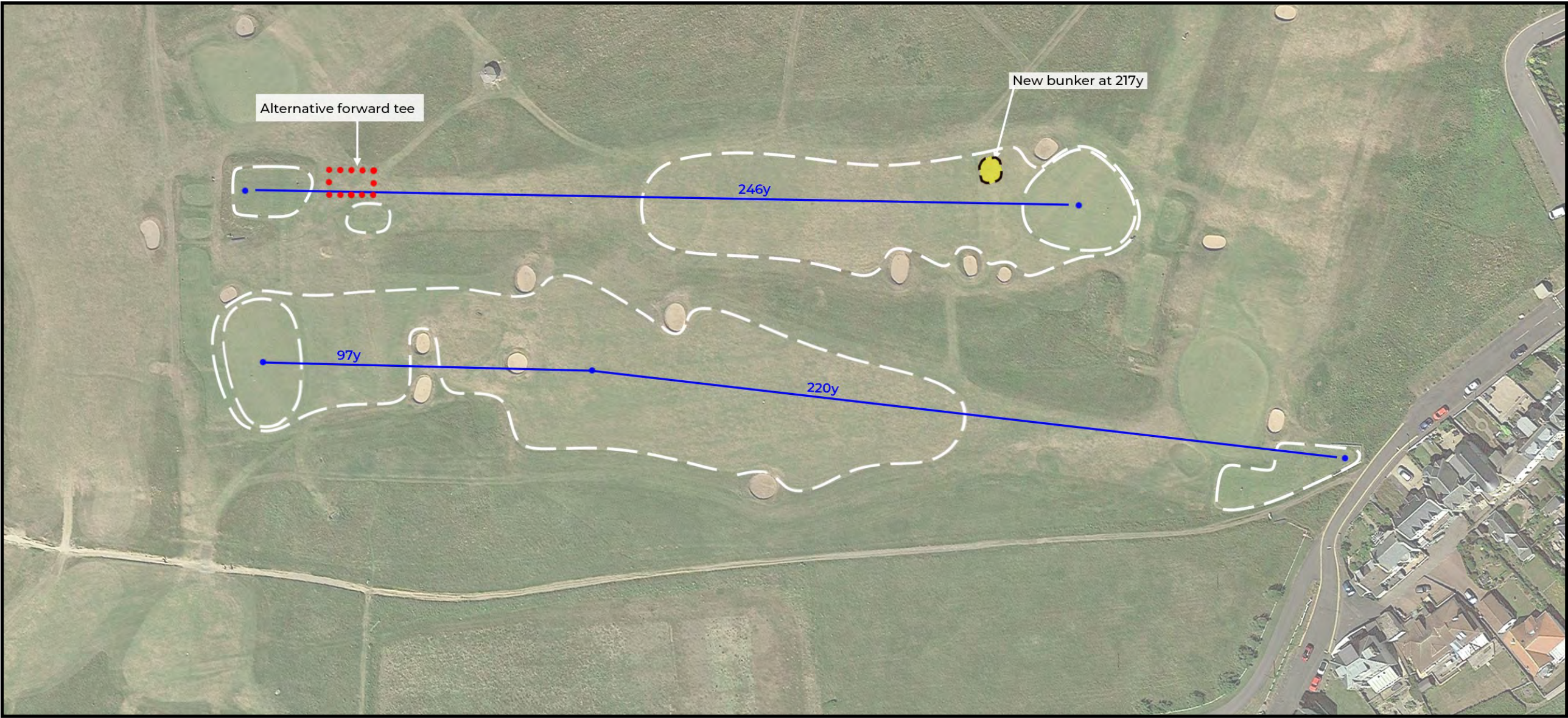


Ground to left of bunker to be levelled



Holes 6 & 7

Hole 7 252y 241y Par 4 217y Par 3



Hole 6 316y 306y 310y Par 4



Holes 6 & 7 Design Proposals

The 6th is a crafty short par 4, tightly bunkered in the landing area which generally forces a lay-up drive for the better players. This has the added advantage of improving safety by reducing the number of wild tee shots heading towards the 7th fairway.

A long term problem, however, has always been the fact that the 10th tee lies immediately behind the 6th green, and as the shot into the green is semi-blind, it is not always clear if players on the tee are in any danger.

The safest option would be to move the green at least 40 metres or so away from the 10th tees, but there are few options available for this without turning the hole into, what would amount to, a very long par 3. Another solution might be to move the green just 12 to 15 metres back up the slope, away from the 10th tees, but this would require some reshaping to level out contours to create the new extended putting surface. As the club has made clear that it would prefer not to alter this green location then it is recommended that any safety conflicts on this hole are monitored to allow issues to be re-evaluated in the future.



Existing 6th green

The 7th hole is a difficult hole to assess. For the men it is a short par 4, easily drivable, especially as it often plays with the wind, and therefore sets up the chance of birdies and eagles. On the other hand, the drive is blind and there is little in the way of strategy as all the hazards are set off to the side and so there is no great thought required from the tee, other than to try and reach the green.

We suggest a new bunker is added on the left side of the approach to the green, some 10 metres from the putting surface. This would just add a little more challenge to the hole without dramatically altering its character or playability.

It does seem odd that women play this hole as a par 3, from not very far forward of the men's tees. As the ladies course has virtually no real short par 4s, I would suggest that, if the ladies club thought there was merit in this idea, then the 7th might provide an excellent opportunity to have one. A new tee could be constructed in front of the main tee so that the hole could be played as a par 4 for women. From here the hole would measure in excess of 220 yards.

Such a tee would also provide a safer teeing area away from the 6th fairway and could be used more generally during the winter. The present forward tee should be retained for the same use.

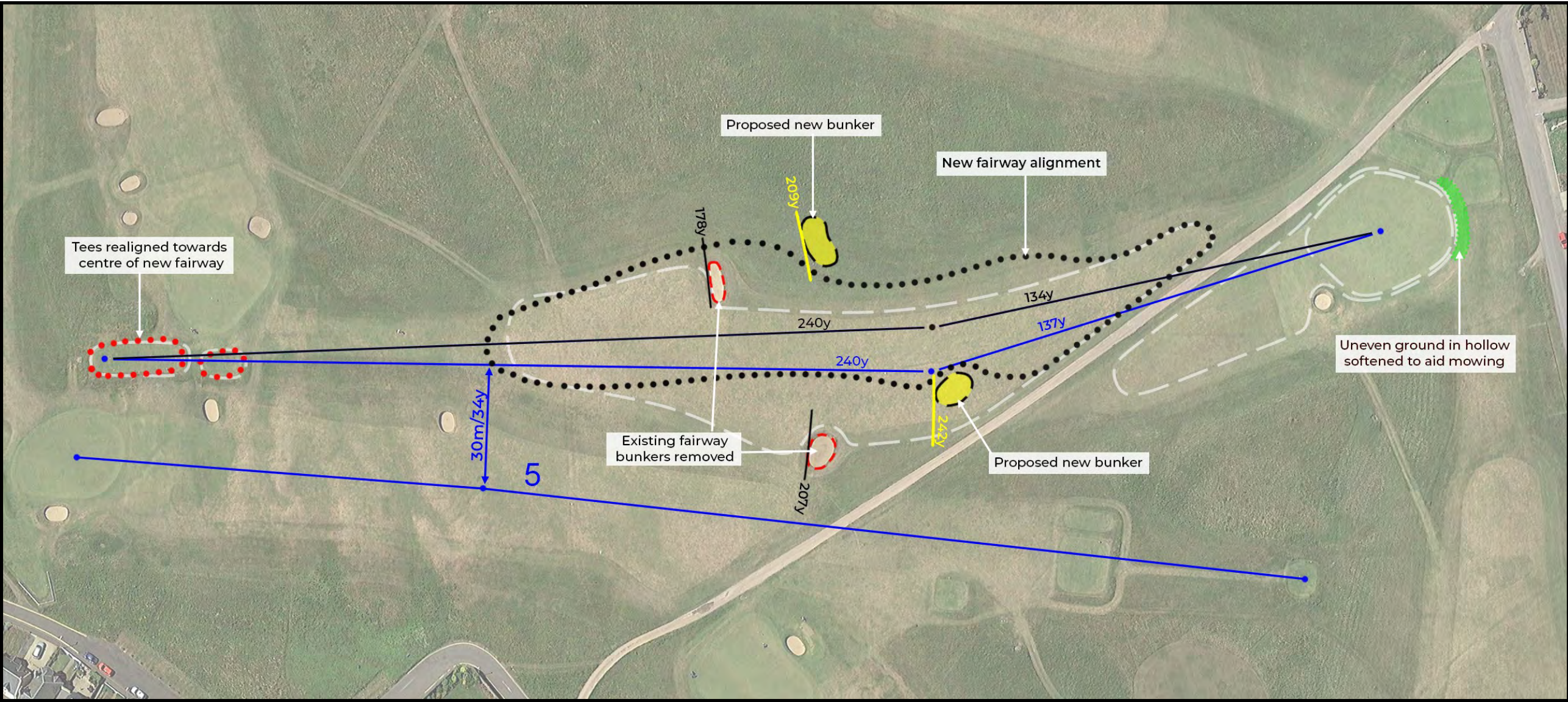


Existing 7th hole



Hole 8

382y 370y 345y Par 4



Hole 8 Design Proposals

The 8th hole is another good par 4 which makes excellent strategic use of the track that runs across the fairway and close to the green.

The most obvious issue with the golf hole is that the two fairway bunkers are positioned so that they do not challenge the better player. Rather they are there to penalize the shorter hitter who has strayed offline. This is largely as a result of changes to golf equipment and the ball travelling much further.

Our normal recommendation would be to retain the same strategy and character of the golf hole but move the bunkers further down the fairway at an appropriate distance from the tee, to ensure the strategy of the hole once again put questions into the mind of the player about how to play their drive.

However, on this hole there is also the possibility to improve safety by angling the fairway to the left, away from the 5th hole and this should also be considered when determining the locations of new bunkers.

Our suggestion is that the centre of the fairway could be moved some 12 to 15 metres to the left. The existing bunkers would be removed and two new bunkers placed a further 30 to 40 metres down the fairway at a similar off-set. These bunkers should be constructed so that they can clearly be seen from the teeing area.

The line into the 8th green would be altered slightly, with the approach playing less down the line of the track, but this would present a different and more difficult challenge for anyone approaching the green from the left side.

The tees should also be realigned towards the centre of the new fairway and this may require some reconstruction in order to not lose teeing space on a hole with a marked shortage already of teeing area.

Our recommendation would be that the 8th tees should be moved away from both the 5th green and 7th green to improve safety. However, the only way this can be achieved is if the 7th hole is realigned to the left and becomes a par 3, to make room for the 8th tee complex.



Uneven ground behind the 8th green

As at the 4th green, the hollow behind the green on this hole has some awkward bumps and slopes which makes it difficult to maintain short grass. This area could easily be regraded and smoothed out to assist mowing, whilst retaining the same characteristics of the existing humps and hollows.



The present 8th hole

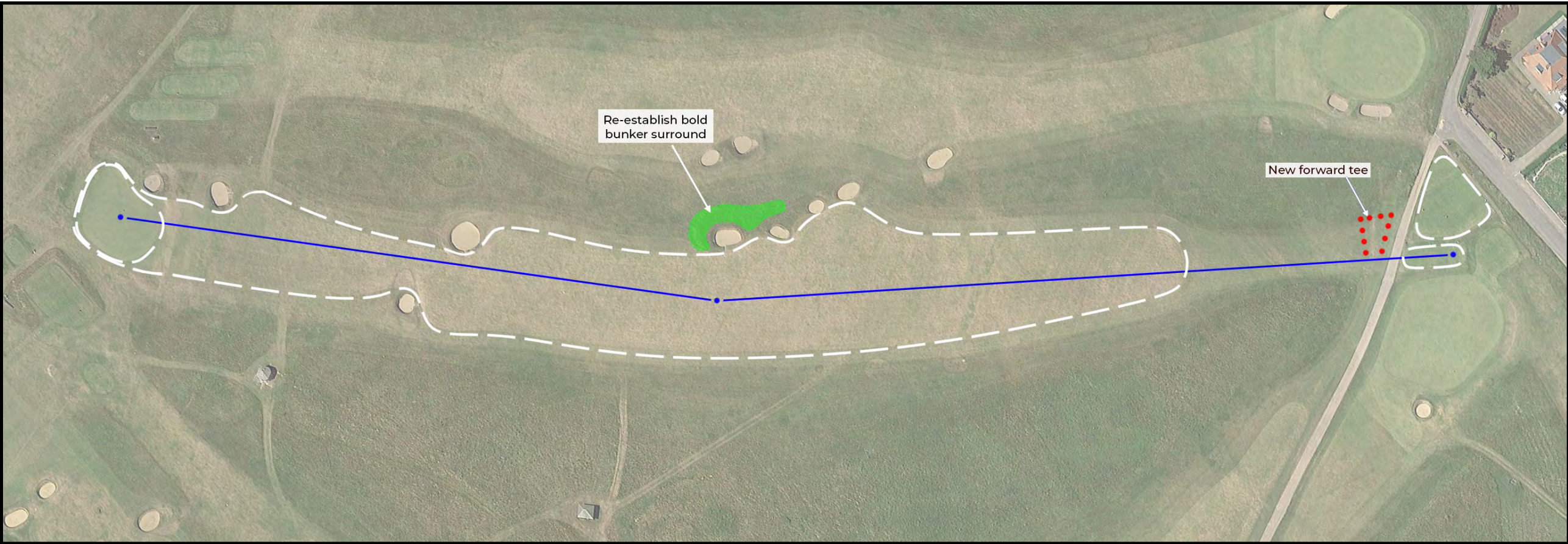


The proposed 8th hole with realigned fairway and new bunkering



Hole 9

440y 432y 433y Par 4





Hole 9 Design Proposals

The long 9th is one of the strongest and best holes on the course and there are few recommendations for improvements.

The small teeing area could be extended by constructing a new forward tee on the other side of the track (where there was clearly a tee previously).

The recent work on the fairway bunkers has helped to make them more visible from the tee, but it has resulted in a big change to the shaping of the mounds around the bunkers, which had previously been a real feature of the hole. We would suggest that the original ridgeline should be restored closer to its original shape.



The mounding around the fairway bunkers today

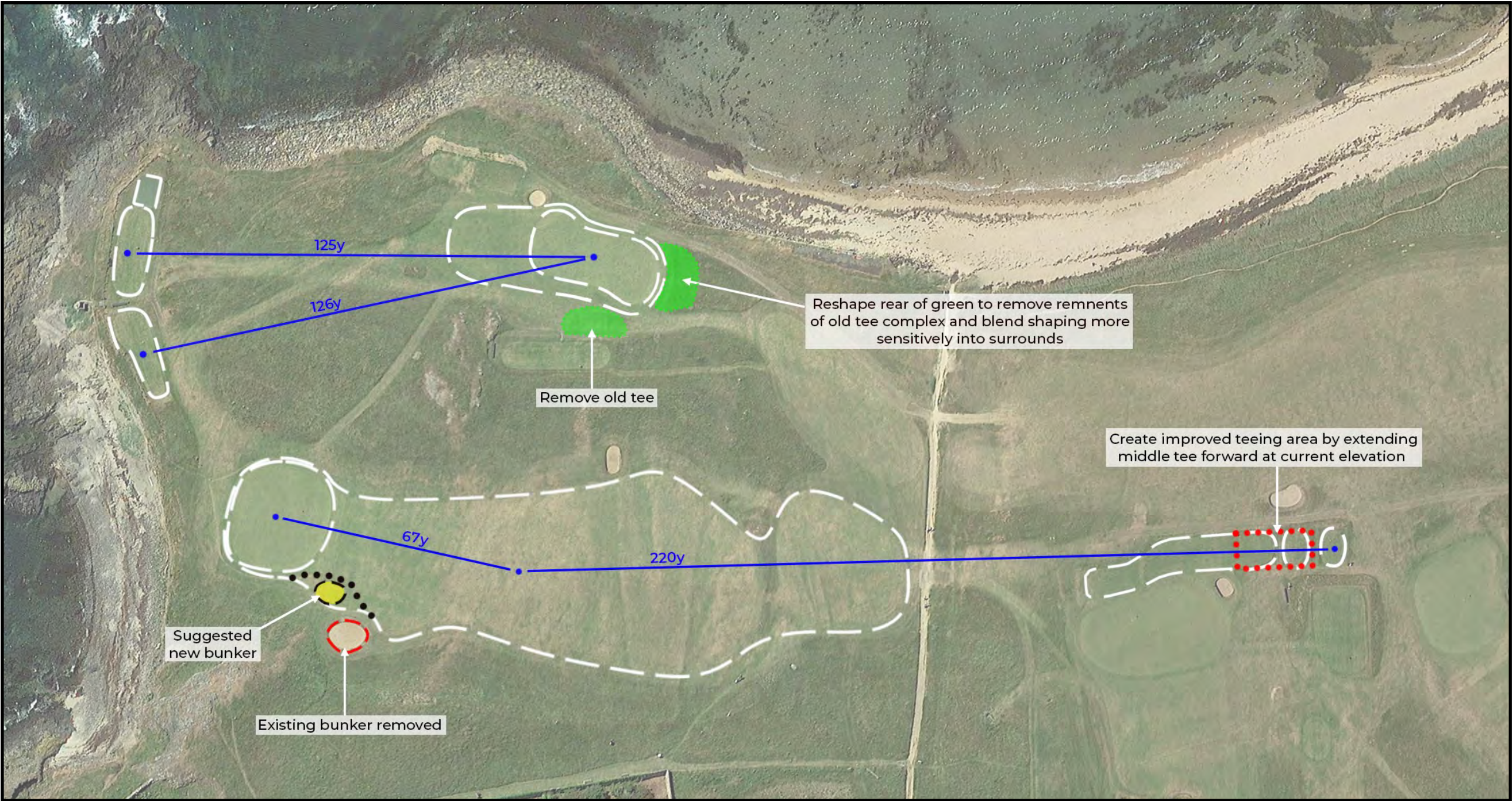


The original mounding around the fairway bunkers



Holes 10 & 11

Hole 10 288y 278y 239y Par 4



Hole 11 131y 131y 133y Par 3

Hole 10 Design Proposals

This is a great short par 4 although with the longer driving distances, rather easier to reach from the tee than it once was. With no real chance of lengthening the hole we would recommend redesigning the tee to allow more tee shots from further back on the tee platform. Joining the small second tee platform to the back of the main tee would create a larger teeing area for regular play and allow the hole to be played with slightly more length.

Although the scorecard has the yellow tee at 278 yards it frequently plays at around 255 yards. The new tee would allow the hole to be played at between 260 and 275 yards. This tee would also pull the teeing area for more golfers away from the 6th green.

Near the green, the bunker short and to the right of the putting surface is somewhat out of play, and has little influence on driving line or on approach shots. If the ground conditions are favourable (i.e. there is no rock below the surface), then the bunker could be moved closer to the green where it would carry much more of a threat.



Present 10th tees



Proposed 10th tees



Existing greenside bunker



Relocated greenside bunker



Hole 11 Design Proposals

This short par 3 is a difficult hole to sum up. Obviously the setting is fantastic but the blind tee shot will not be popular with everyone. In my opinion the green has never been quite right since it was rebuilt and extended over the old 12th tees. The shaping makes it look as if that was exactly what was done and the contouring around the green never felt properly completed.

The grassing over of the track on the left side is a good move, but the rest of the surrounds at the back of the green and the small tee on the right side could all be reshaped to make the green feel as if it sits within a self-contained hollow.

Other options for the location of the 11th hole were considered, including playing from a tee on the left side of the 10th fairway to a new green close to the existing 11th teeing ground, and another from a tee, again located to the left but this time playing across the small bay behind the 10th green.

The big advantage to finding an alternative position for the 11th hole is, of course, that there would no longer be a conflict with the 12th. However, the alternatives all created their own problems, including:

- golfers playing the 11th crossing or passing very close to the 10th
- potential issues with land ownership
- difficulties for construction and the establishment of a new green in such an exposed position
- Playability for all standards of golfer

Our recommendation is, therefore, that the 11th hole remains in its current location and future works are concentrated on improving the setting of the green complex.



Untidy shaping of green surrounds at the 11th



View from rear of 11th green

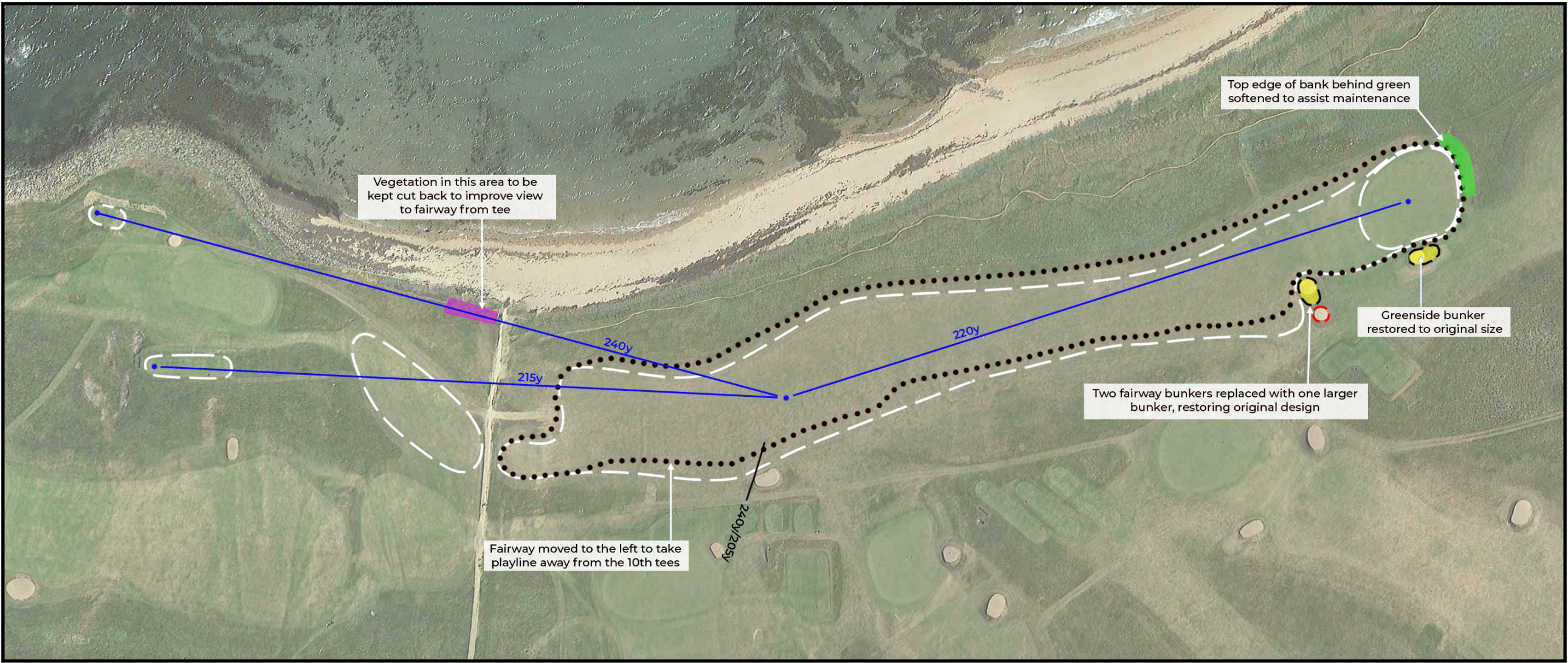


Proposed reshaping of 11th green surrounds



Hole 12

466y 436y Par 4 415y Par 5



Hole 12 Design Proposals

The longest hole on the course, the 12th hugs the shoreline of West Bay. The danger of balls being sliced from the tee towards the 10th tees has been a perennial problem, but other safety factors also come into play with the Fife Coastal Path running down the left side of the hole and then crossing in front of the tees, and then there is the beach itself.

To remove safety concerns with the Coastal Path would require the 12th tees being moved a long way forward and to the right, which would likely cause more internal safety issues. The lack of a reasonable design solution accentuates the importance of clear signage, warning golfers of potential conflicts with the public.

The two bunkers on the right of the green approach are more examples of bunkers which have been getting continually smaller over the years. The right side bunker is difficult to make out and has no real strategic value. This could be removed and the left side bunker expanded to compensate, returning the bunkering closer to its pre-1950 form. The removal of the right side bunker would leave more space between the remaining bunker and the 13th tee, which would widen a heavily trafficked area. Alternatively it could be allowed to grow up as rough.

At the green the bunker on the right side has also shrunk in size after having been reshaped. The contours around it used to sweep shots leaking to the right of the green into the bunker, but these have also been altered. We recommend that the bunker is returned to something closer to its original size and the original shaping restored.

The depression at the back of the green has a sharp change of angle. This is another area where softening the top edge would facilitate easier maintenance.



The reshaped greenside bunker



Bunkering on the approach to the 12th green



Existing bunkering at 12th green approach

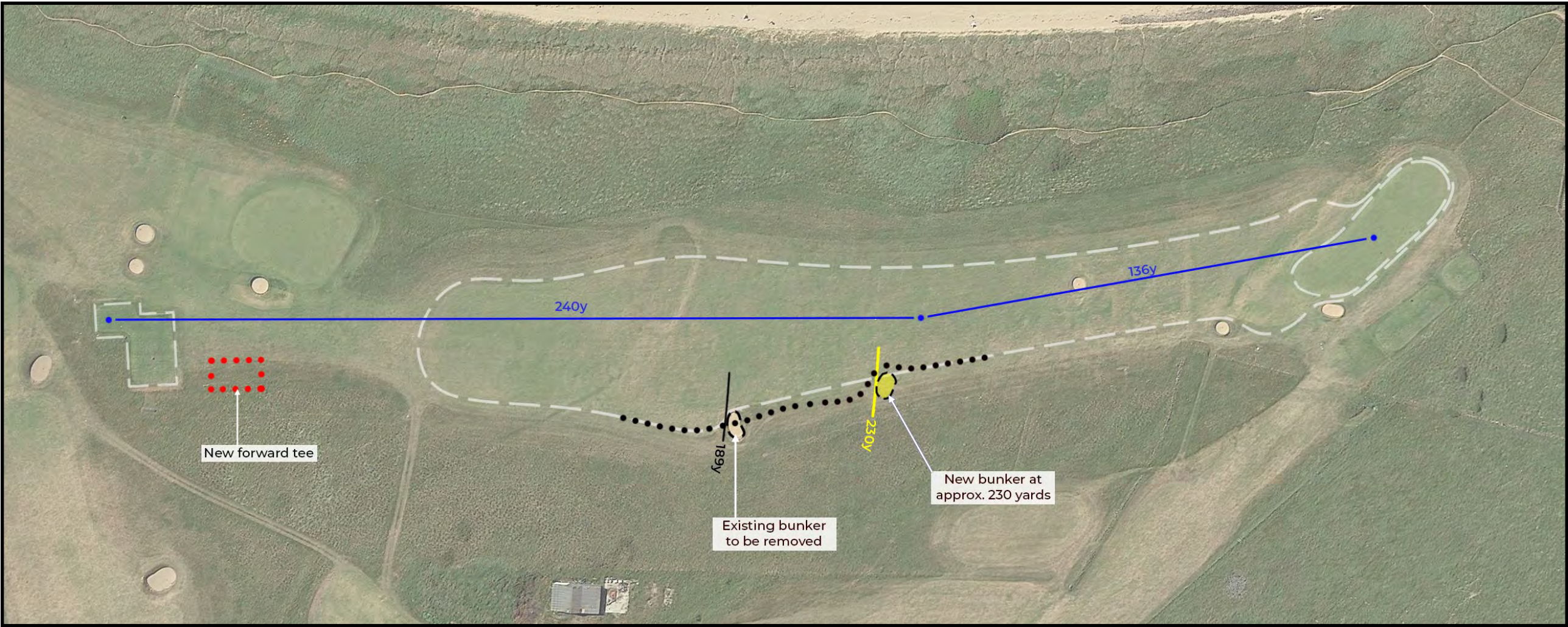


Proposed bunkering at 12th green approach



Hole 13

380y 371y 355y Par 4



Hole 13 Design Proposals

There is no doubt that the 13th hole is one of the best on the golf course. Indeed, it is probably one of the best strategic golf holes anywhere.

The main recommendation concerns the fairway bunkering. The bunker on the right of the fairway is at only around 189 yards (173m) from the back of the tee and is easily passed by better players. It is another example of bunker positioning tending to penalize the poorer golfer, rather than challenging the category 1 golfer.

Our suggestion is that this bunker is removed and a new bunker placed at around 230 yards (210m). Beyond this the ground dips away and a bunker placed beyond this point would be difficult to see. The location of the new bunker would also tighten up the fairway in the landing area.

Like elsewhere, further reconstruction of the bunkers on this hole should ensure that they do not get any smaller, and in fact, the aim should be to re-establish some of their former size.

With the uphill approach into the green this is a tough hole for higher handicap players and shorter hitters. A new forward tee would provide a shorter and more playable alternative for these players and also provide an additional tee for winter use.



Existing 13th fairway

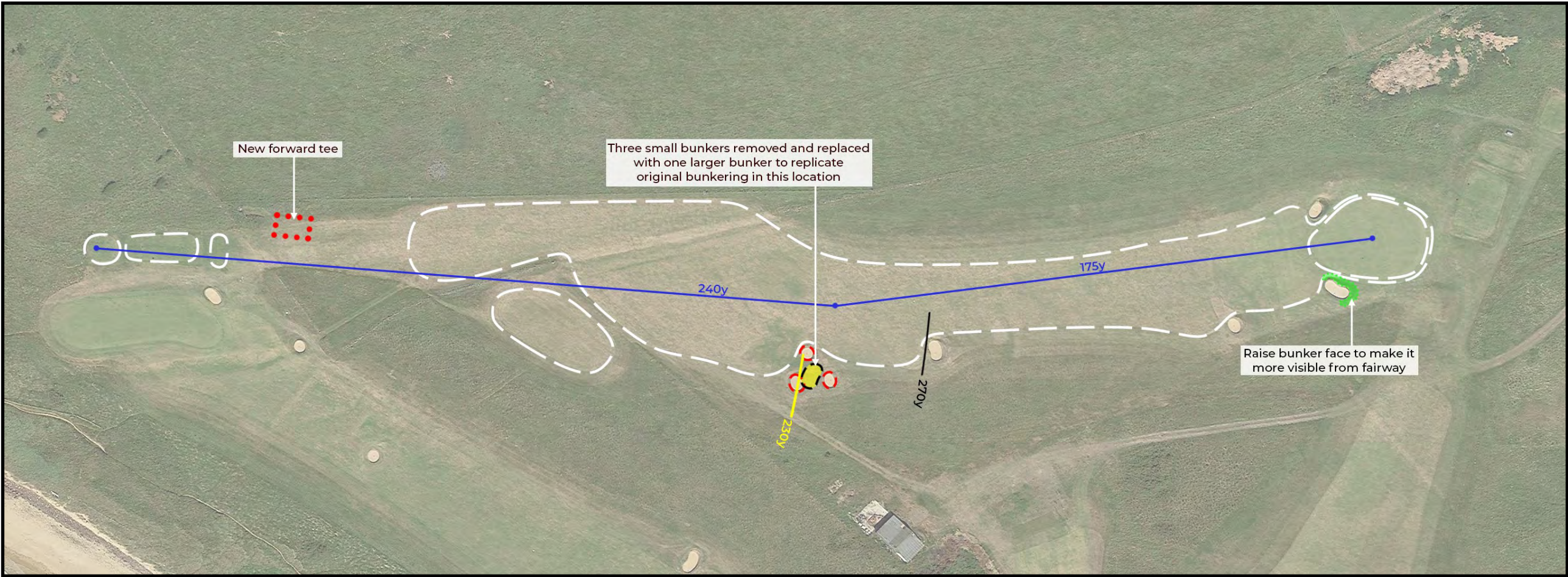


Proposed fairway with new bunker at 230 yards



Hole 14

414y 402y 391y Par 4





Existing fairway bunkering on the 14th fairway



Proposed fairway bunkering on the 14th fairway

Hole 14 Design Proposals

The main proposal for this par 4 is to strengthen the fairway bunkering. The three pot bunkers on the right side of the fairway at about 230 yards have always been an odd addition as there is no similar group of bunkering on the course. They appear to have become smaller over time and are only 3-4 metres wide today. With the wind behind they are easily by-passed by longer drivers who are more concerned no doubt about the bunker 40 yards further on.

It is recommended that the three small bunkers are removed and replaced with one larger bunker. This would, in effect, restore the original bunker that was removed to build the new complex.

At the green the bunker on the right would be improved if it could be made more visible from the fairway with a higher face.

Similar to the 11th, the shaping at the back of the green has never felt to me that it was properly finished after the green was rebuilt. There is no sense of containment, just an abrupt drop off the back of the green. This area could potentially be looked at as part of improvements to the 15th tees.

The 14th is another hole where a forward tee might be helpful for some players. At some time there was clearly a tee about 60 yards ahead of the back tee and this could be restored for use in the future.

There are potential safety conflicts at the teeing area where players tend to leave their bags close to the 13th green. Approach shots to the green often land in this area. Additional signage, warning players on the 13th to only play when the 14th tee is clear, could be considered. Another option would be to install a path on the left of the tee where golfers could leave their bags more safely. Appropriate signage would no doubt be required to encourage golfers to move to this side of the tee.



Shaping at rear of 14th green

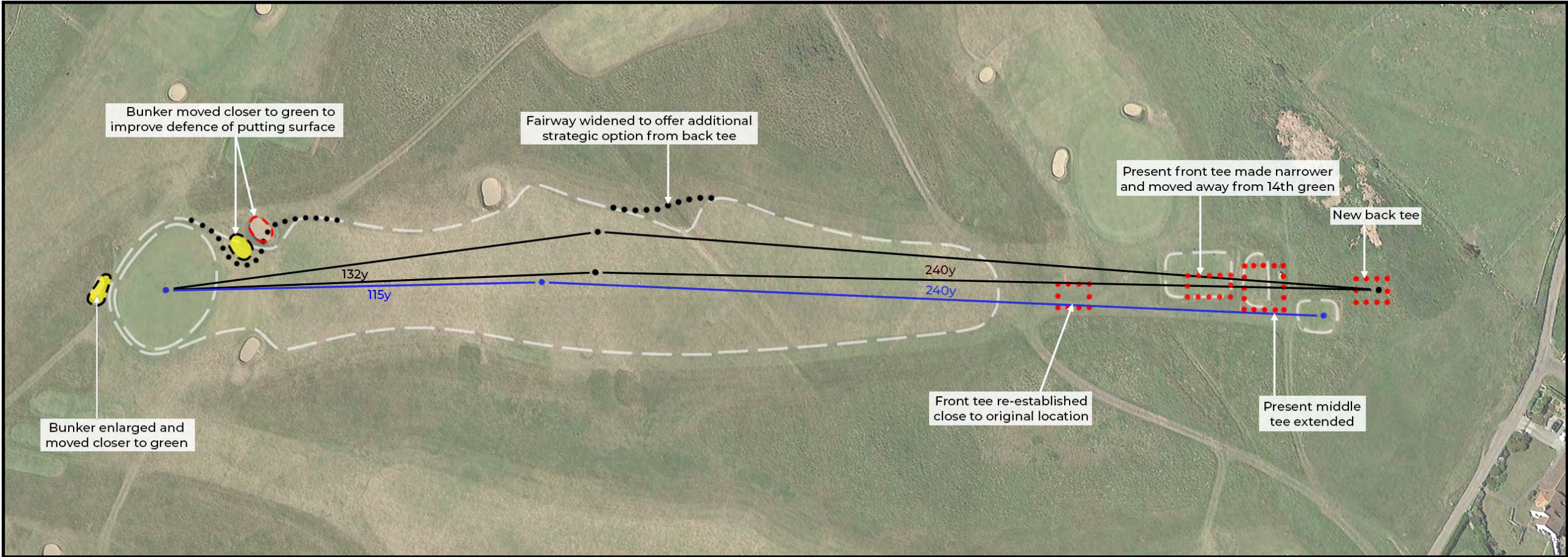


Possible path with retaining wall on left side of tee complex



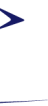
Hole 15

355/338y 303y 321y Par 4





15th tee complex



Proposed changes to 15th tee complex

Hole 15 Design Proposals

The main proposals for the 15th hole centre around the tee complex. This is one of the few places on the course where it would be possible to add a little length with a new back tee.

The tee shown here lengthens the hole to about 370 yards and makes the distance from the tee to the fairway marker close to 260 yards. If this new tee was to be installed then we would also suggest widening the fairway a little on the right side, at the wall, to provide more of an option to play to that side of the fairway from the tee. From here the green is more visible for the 2nd shot and it also brings the bunker on this side closer to the potential play line for the longest drivers.

To improve safety the present middle tee could be extended so that it is large enough to become the main teeing area which would move golfers further away from the 14th green. The present main tee could then be narrowed and the space between there and the 14th possibly grown as rough. The reshaping should aim to provide a better back drop to the 14th green and provide some containment.

There is also the potential for a new forward tee, either by re-establishing an old tee platform or our recommendation would be to move it a little further to the left to take it away from the 14th.

At the green the present bunkering is a long way from the putting surface and has little impact on playing strategy. Moving the left side bunker would be difficult given the contouring in that area, but the bunker on the right could be relocated closer to the green where it would have more influence on approach shots, especially from the right side of the fairway.

This may be controversial, but the bunker at the back of the green could be enlarged and moved a fraction closer to the putting surface so that it really becomes a hazard on what is not a very well defended green at present.



Bunker at back of green could be extended



Existing bunkering at 15th green

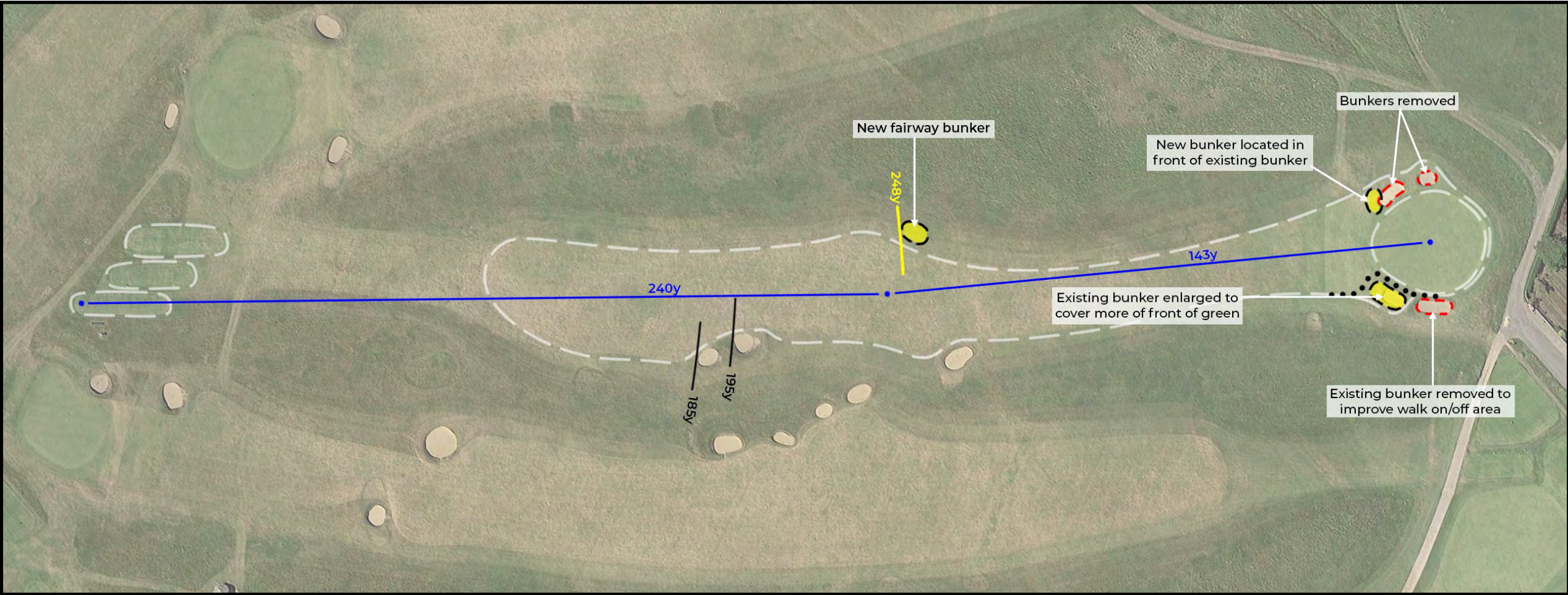


15th green complex with relocated right greenside bunker



Hole 16

407y 397y 373y Par 4



Hole 16 Design Proposals

The blind tee shot at this hole means that the fairway hazards on the right side are not obvious from the tee, but, as with many other holes, they really only bother the poorer player, unless the hole is being played into the wind. To combat this a new fairway bunker is proposed on the left side at just under 250 yards from the tee.

The existing bunkers are worth retaining as they are an important part of the traditional character of this hole.

The bunkering at the green was altered in the last thirty years or so, creating two bunkers on the left and two on the right. The far bunkers probably see little action and the furthest bunker on the right impacts on the walk on/off area to the 17th tee. Our recommendation is to restore the bunkering closer to its original design intent, with one bunker on the right covering slightly more of that corner of the green and the two left side bunkers removed and replaced with a wider bunker just short of the putting surface. This would tighten the entrance to the green and help to guard hole locations better on both sides of the green.



Existing 16th green approach

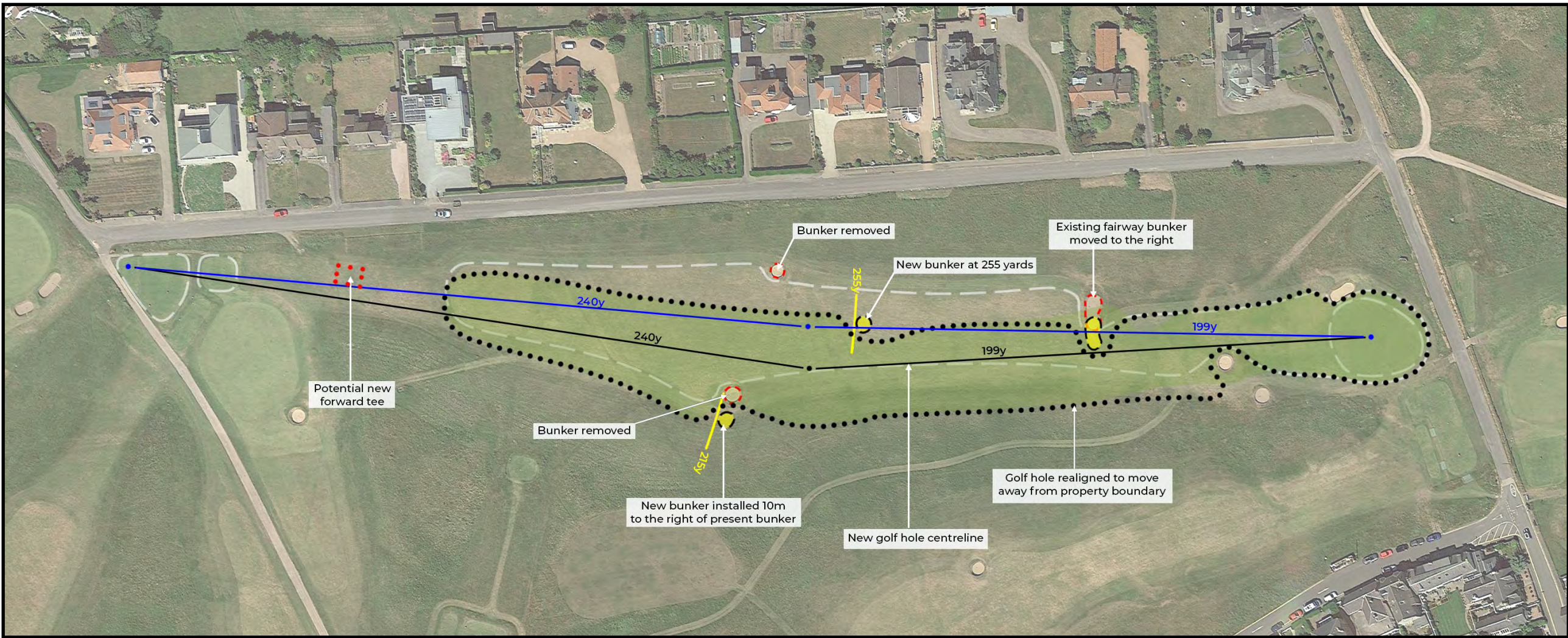


Proposed 16th green approach with adjusted bunkering



Hole 17

439y 434y Par 4 433y Par 5



Hole 17 Design Proposals

The 17th is another of several strong par 4s on the back nine. The proposals illustrated are centred around moving the golf hole to the right, away from property on the left side. At present there does not seem to be a major problem with complaints from home owners, but the club should be aware of potential solutions should problems occur. Our recommendation would always be that golf clubs should be pro-active in these situations and make the necessary changes to reduce potential safety conflicts before problems occur.

The proposed centre line for the golf hole would move some 15 metres to the right so that the present right edge of the fairway would now mark the middle of the fairway at around 240 yards (220m) from the back of the tee. This point would be about 63 metres from the edge of the housing property line and 55 metres from the edge of the road.

The present fairway bunker would need to be altered accordingly, but we would recommend that the bunker on the left side at about 225 yards (205m) is relocated anyway, even if the golf hole is not realigned, so that it can be brought more into play for better golfers.

These proposals illustrate the right side fairway bunker at 215 yards (195m) and the bunker on the left at 255 yards (233m).

We do not see the need to adjust bunkers at the green and on the right side of the green approach, but the large bunker about 80 metres from the front of the green could be moved to the right, so that it ties into the new fairway alignment.

This is another hole where a new forward tee could be considered, located some 50 metres in front of the main tee and away from the 8th green. This would be a safer option than the current front tee which is positioned immediately adjacent to the 8th green.



Existing 17th tee with road to the left and 8th green on the right



Present 17th fairway

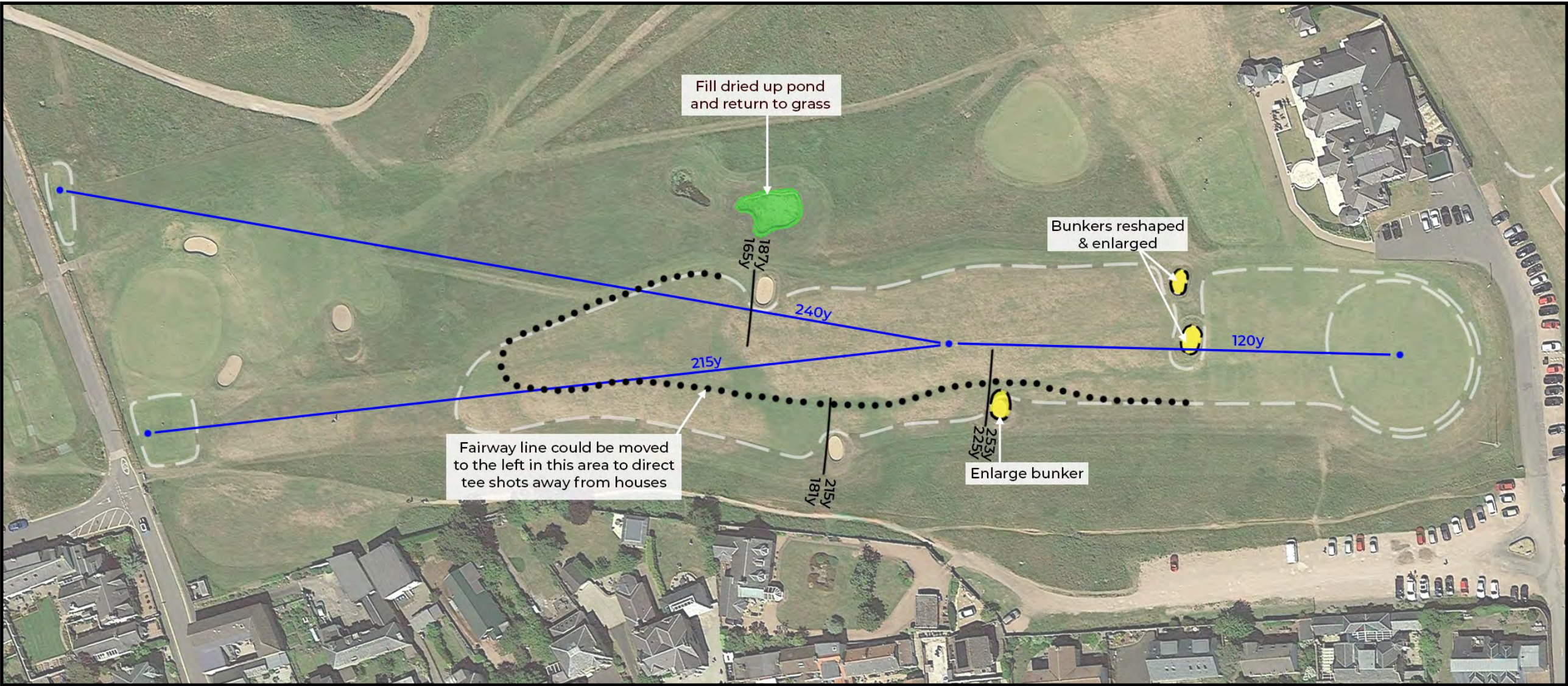


Proposed realigned 17th fairway with adjusted left side bunker



Hole 18

359y 337y 347y Par 4



Hole 18 Design Proposals

Recommendations for the 18th are again based around safety, predominantly because of the nearness of homes on the right side of the hole.

Determining a remedy to completely resolve any conflict on the 18th is almost impossible without seriously compromising the quality of the golf hole.

Any potential problems with adjoining properties are likely to come from shots played from the old 18th tee, on the right side of the 3rd green. In itself, its close proximity to the green already lends itself to danger from shots on the 3rd, but there is nowhere else to place this tee unless it is moved forward 80 yards or so and the hole effectively becomes a par 3.

From the newer tee on the left side of the 3rd green, there is much less chance of conflict. Unfortunately there is virtually no room to extend this tee forward because of the likelihood of safety problems with the drive from the 3rd tee.

Warning signs may be required on both the 3rd and 18th tees to warn golfers of the potential safety issues.

As such, the recommendations are to revise the bunkering and mowing pattern of the fairway to encourage golfers to play further to the left. This would involve enlarging the right side fairway bunker at 225 and 253 yards. The right side of the first section of fairway could also be brought in, to make it narrower and move the alignment to the left.

If golf balls leaving the bounds of the course to the right of this hole were to become an issue in the future, then the possibility of installing safety netting is something the club may have to consider.

The two bunkers short of the green have changed considerably in recent times. They are now much smaller than they were with steep, revetted faces. We would suggest that they are returned to their original size with less steep faces, whether that be with revetting or a plain grass face.



Tee adjacent to 3rd green



Bunkers on green approach 2015



Proposed realigned 18th fairway with enlarged right side bunker

4. Summary

In this strategic review we have tried to identify the main issues we believe should be addressed by The Golf House Club, Elie in order to establish the priorities for future development of their golf facilities.

We would recommend that addressing some of the safety issues described, particularly at the 4th hole, should be a priority, but there are a number of other areas where we believe relatively minor works would lead to substantial improvements.

This is an updated review of Earlsferry and Elie Links following initial feedback from the Club.



Better Vision
Better Design