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Machrihanish improvement pays off with elite visitors

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CONFIRMATION that a £30million project to improve the Mull of Kintyre as a golfing destination was worth it has come with Machrihanish included by a well-heeled group on a forthcoming trip of Europe.

The money was spent by American businessman David Southworth on augmenting the world-renowned Machrihanish Golf Club with another top-class course, the David McLay-Kidd designed Machrihanish Dunes, as well as high-quality accommodation. Phase one, a restaurant/pub and a group of golf cottages, was done to such a standard that it won Golf Tourism's "Small Hotel of the Year" award.

Phase two has seen the Ugadale Hotel at Machrihanish re-opened after a major makeover, with the Royal Hotel in nearby Campbeltown getting the same treatment at the moment ahead of a grand opening later in the spring.

"The lack of quality accommodation has certainly been an issue – the area needed a four-star accommodation option," said Keith Martin, director of golf at Machrihanish Dunes.

"It's only because the Ugadale Hotel and cottages are now open that Machrihanish is being included on a private-plane tour of Europe's 'Most Scenic Golf Courses', which is being run by a Swiss golf tour operator. They are bringing a private jet full of golfers to visit the area. This never would have happened before."

The Dunes, which opened in 2009, is gearing up for the start of the new season on 1 April and such "high-end" visitors are behind what Southworth, the head of Massachusetts-based Southworth Development, is doing with the course.

Martin, who moved across the country from Eyemouth in Berwickshire, added: "If we weren't trying to cater to the world's most discriminating golf travellers, we wouldn't be undergoing all these course enhancements each winter.

"Editors of international golf magazines have long recognised the status of the Machrihanish Golf Club course and, more recently, the Mach Dunes. But, because it's an out-of-the-way place, they couldn't recommend it as easily as other destinations. Now they can and they have."

On-course work at the Dunes over the winter has included the alteration of four green sites to increase options for pin positions. Attention has also been paid to the rough, in tandem with Scottish Natural Heritage, to make it more playable yet more diverse at the same time.

"The course is maturing nicely and are very happy with the product we will have from the beginning of April," said Martin.

"We have been waiting for it to reach the next level. But I would think we could get a major Scottish event or a ladies' event and go from there," he added of it as a possible tournament venue.

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