Struck by the wide variety of misinformed comment, I hear from many Club members on golf course maintenance (and aren't they all experts), I am prompted to ask one simple question: Are you getting your money's worth? With few exceptions, the answer depends on how well the green committee relate with the greenkeeper.

The norm for admission to green committee status often seems to be coercion, with the sometime carrot of Club captaincy perhaps an attraction, though all too often the incumbent knows little or nothing about agronomy, course management or course architecture. How then can that weakness in the chain - knowledge - be overcome in order that the green committee man may participate effectively in an overall maintenance programme which will continue long after he is done with committee life?

This is not the problem it seems, for the answer - practiced and preached by all effective managers - is communication.

Visiting Letchworth Golf Club, where Duncan McGilvray is the course manager, I was impressed by one of the best structures I've seen yet, where Duncan works not in isolation but as an equal in golfing terms. He eats lunch in the dining room, talks with most of the members both on and off the course and enjoys regular dialogue with the Club secretary and his course liaison officer - a one on one course - as well as playing the course regularly and being active at meetings. The result is that he knows what members want.

The antithesis of this enlightened approach came to my attention at a northern Club where most members didn't know the head greenkeeper's name and where a bunch of low handicappers were exerting authority to toughen the course up to the detriment of the rank and file majority. The final outcome of this aggression has yet to surface, but with the head man listening to the few, my guess would be that his job could be on the line.

There are problems in having too many bosses and again Letchworth have it right. Members may button-hole Duncan with ideas but they know how the course is managed and that only declared policy can be implemented. Such policy is well documented and programmed long term. It not only works but can be seen to be working.

The weakness of an ineffectual green committee can manifest itself in another and even more insidious fashion when complaints fail to reach the ears of the head greenkeeper. I know of more than one case where silence resigned and resulted in a programme continuing in total disregard to the members' wishes. The end result, when called to explain the direction the course was heading, was that yet another greenkeeper - rightly protesting that he hadn't heard of such problems and where early communication would have diverted the bubbling volcano - was forced to look elsewhere for a job.

In advocating an enlightened approach to course management via the green committee it would be wrong not to highlight the sterling work carried out by the STRI agronomists. They do a grand job but are quite clearly overworked. An annual course visit is fine but when isolated problems loom large and time is not on their side, Clubs must pay for expert advice and get advice fast. The wise greenkeeper will know not only his own course but those around him and will be able to guide his committee. If there is a moral to all this it is a simple one - communication wins friends and influences people and the good course is one where regular informed dialogue between green chairman and greenkeeper takes place. Added to this might be the truism that is much in fashion these days: a green committee should consist of an odd number... and three is too many!