As the acceptance of — and demand for — benefits provided by the automatic watering of extensive sports turf playing surfaces gathers momentum, it is evident that the sourcing and conservation of viable water supplies are fast becoming major issues.

This is especially relevant to golf where, in addition to the numbers of new courses being constructed every year, more and more existing Clubs, faced by increases in traffic, are investing in automatic watering systems to help greenkeepers overcome maintenance problems created by wear and tear — and equally important, present courses on a par to those seen during televised tournaments.

In the south, the vast growth of residential development plus a waste disposal dump, tells me, fairway watering has been specified in addition to planning for pop-ups around greens and tees. In this instance, the lake — initially filled with ‘winter water’ — will be capable of supplying enough water to service the system without replenishment for up to three weeks.

As might be expected, the lake is not being created just to make the course look attractive — it will also serve as a reservoir for a pop-up system for greens, tees and approaches. The lake, capable of holding 1.25 million gallons, will be fed by two natural springs and possibly a stream containing treated water which runs from the nearby sewage treatment plant. Top-up supplies — mains water — will be piped into a break-tank and held, prior to being pumped into the lake.

Tony Gadd, course manager at Barton says that the treated water supply will most probably be used as an emergency source although tests may well prove its viability for everyday use on the course.

Footnote: Clubs should be aware that a licence to abstract water — be it from the mains, a river flowing through the course, a natural spring or by sinking boreholes — is a mandatory requirement. Club secretaries should consider the importance of the need to become relatively self-sufficient in terms of water supplies.

The provision of a reservoir — such as a large pond or lake — would, I’m told, be no more than £10-£15,000, depending on location, soil structure and ease of construction. When I asked about disposal of the resultant spoil, he replied to the effect that this could be used to build an island green. It will do so, providing it is designed and installed correctly, maintained thoughtfully and serviced regularly.

The greenkeeping team can contribute much to achieve consistency of operation by learning as much as they can about the system. Sensibly, one member of the green staff should be given the responsibility of keeping a daily eye on the equipment and carrying out relatively minor adjustments or repairs. This will entail some training — often provided by the irrigation contractor who installed the system.

As knowledge and experience is gained, these skills can be put to good use: saving time, (awaiting an outside engineer to arrive and solve what is often a simple fault) frayed tempers and the possible loss of thousands of gallons of precious water should a sprinkler malfunction or pipe joint fail.

Talking of maintenance, Clubs should also consider the importance of budgeting for at least one major inspection and service each year. This is best achieved by arranging a contract with the company responsible for installing the system originally, or where contract has been lost, by asking the British Turf and Landscape Irrigation Association to provide the name of a suitable alternative.

In real terms, the lake, full of ‘winter water’ for use in late March or early April onwards, would only require topping-up through the summer. If used for greens, tees and approaches, the lake, capable of holding 1.25 million gallons, will be fed by two natural springs and possibly a stream containing treated water which runs from the nearby sewage treatment plant. Top-up supplies — mains water — will be piped into a break-tank and held, prior to being pumped into the lake.

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