Golf's increasing popularity has brought a big demand for new courses; and the market has responded with some 1,400 planning applications to satisfy public need. But are the right courses being built? LAURENCE PITHIE examines the facts.

A few years have passed since an advisory panel to the R&A published the document 'Demand For Golf', stating the need to provide another 700 or so courses over the next decade. With some 1,400 planning applications currently being lodged with local authorities, it appears the initial target will be reached well before the end of the century. However, this does not necessarily augur well for the future since there are not enough qualified architects, contractors or greenkeepers available to design, construct and maintain them to the desired standard.

Whether or not the R&A's assessment is accurate is perhaps irrelevant. What is important is that the right type of course is provided, one that is developed in a professional manner and at a price which can be reflected in acceptable future playing costs. This article examines the current situation and asks: 'Are these new courses meeting current demand?'

From its early origins in the 15th century and indeed for the next 400 years, golf was a game enjoyed only by the affluent members of society and mainly limited to the east coast of Scotland. Since the costs of hand made clubs and balls were prohibitive, the game remained an exclusive pastime until the invention of the 'guttie' ball around 1850. The spread of the railway network and the much publicised matches between the Dunn's and the Morris's also had a significant influence on golf's advancement.

Since the late 19th century golf has enjoyed various surges in popularity, as well as periods of decline brought about by two world wars and economic depression. The phenomenal rise in golf's popularity in the USA and the advent of TV coverage during the early '60s brought a resurgence of interest to our shores, which was further enhanced by the arrival of celebrities such as Palmer and Nicklaus. In fact it was Nicklaus who did much to encourage more American professionals to play in The Open Championship, despite its then 'sagging' fortunes, and for this the R&A are eternally grateful. The emergence of European players and the effect of Ryder Cup victories, along with increased leisure time, has led to a dramatic rise in the game's popularity. People from all walks of life are eager to tread new ground and, subsequently, golf is currently being played by well over a million people, with many more attending driving ranges and pitch and putt courses, making it a multi-million pound industry.

To many observers, it would appear that the game is in a healthy state. Most private Clubs have long membership waiting lists and public courses are played from dawn till dusk, often with players sleeping in cars overnight in order to reserve a tee time later in the day. The reality is that many wishing to take up the game can neither apply to join or play at a private Club, as they do not have a handicap. Public courses are few in number and it is tiresome obtaining a tee time booking, especially in the more populated regions. It is this dilemma which the R&A recognised, leading to the conclusion that many new courses were required.

At first glance the solution appears relatively simple. Since agriculture is proving less profitable due to EC quotas and falling grain prices, many farmers can sell off surplus land to enterprising developers or indeed finance course construction themselves. A recent survey indicated a vast untapped market ready to take up the game, so it would appear that turning fields into fairways was as safe a bet as initial investment in electricity shares. A number of local councils have been practically deluged with planning applications, but are not quite as sympathetically inclined as previously, especially where many applications had proven to be 'back-door' approaches to building hotels, housing, conference centres and the like. Proposed new ventures are now met with tighter controls, with the question of golf's environmental impact one of paramount importance for planning committees to consider.

The days when a group of enthusiasts met in a local inn to discuss forming a golf club and creating their own course are probably gone forever.
plethora of the latter, some with adjoining hotels, all vying for a slice of the same limited market. Some, like East Sussex National, have been the centre of much media coverage and indeed golf can be played at East Sussex National on two immaculately maintained courses, but it will cost the earth for that privilege.

One of the main problems facing the industry today is that too many 'executive' style courses are being built at over-inflated cost, often designed by ex-tournament professionals who have become self-acclaimed golf course architects seeking a living by other means. These 'signature' courses have a glitz and glamour approach, with the aim of producing even more spectacular courses seemingly for the sole benefit of being photographed for glossy magazines, which help to increase membership and sell a few adjacent houses. Many have become 7,000 yard monsters and are far too severe and demanding for the vast majority. They also tend to be maintenance nightmares, requiring an almost unlimited budget, which in turn must be reflected in the cost of memberships and green fees. It comes as no surprise that many such ventures have either collapsed or are facing financial ruin, as potential customers are frightened off by the exorbitant costs featured. Indeed, many such courses have been forced to reduce green fee charges considerably, merely in order to survive.

Similar projects are unlikely to get off the ground as the current recession bites deeper, the reality being that there are just too many of these 'top end of the market' ventures. The escalating costs in once favoured regions such as the Algarve and Costa Del Sol (now nicknamed Costa too Much!) should have rung alarm bells for the developers back home. It is beyond doubt that the average British golfer is just not prepared to pay the vast sums demanded, and this has resulted in these sun-drenched courses playing host
'All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of those who must follow to maintain such ‘creations’.

The main problem facing the industry is perhaps even more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of the sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures ‘on hold’ awaiting financial investment.