Golf clubs today are the haunts of many a varied character, transcending social barriers and attracting both working class and aristocracy alike. In fact, regardless of your social history and given the right connections, just about anybody has a good chance of being accepted into an established golf club. The only qualifications required are a small knowledge of the game, a friend who is already a member, a willingness to part with a few readies and the patience to endure many years of waiting.

It has always amazed me how in this day and age of turbulent economies, business strategies and cut-throat competition that the golf club seems fit to maintain a never-ending waiting list. Surely the number one rule of business is to ensure the price fits demand. If demand is high then so should be the price. True, a golf club is not strictly a business, but it does provide a service to paying customers and the quality of that service is dependent upon financial input. If people are not prepared to pay the necessary money for that standard of service, then they do not get in the club.

Assuming a golf club is efficiently run then the member pays the money and he or she has no right to complain “Why is that society booked in today just when I want to play?” Because we must subsidise your annual dues. “Why then is the rough not cut on the fourth?” Because you are not prepared to pay for enough greenkeepers or equipment to have this done on a regular basis. “Why does it take me five hours for a round of golf?” Because the course is saturated with golf in an effort to keep down the subs. It’s a bit like someone buying a Metro and then complaining to the manufacturers that it will not do 180mph. Well, of course it won’t; you’ve bought a Metro and not a Ferrari.

No doubt many club members reading this will at this point be somewhere between slightly irritated and extremely angry. “But I pay a bloody fortune!” they will explode, as if that gives them the right to complain. Well, I will concede that in some circumstances that is the case, but in those cases standards are very high and there is therefore little to complain about. Generally speaking though, this fortune theory is somewhat debatable.

For example, if I want to play snooker it will cost me £4 an hour even though I am a club member. Let’s call it £2 because I will split the cost with my playing partner. If I then play for as long as it takes me to play a fairly quick round of golf it will cost me £3 x 2 = £6. Quite cheap when you think about it. But if, like a typical club golfer, I play twice a week then my annual budget for snooker is £600, or more than the vast majority of golf clubs’ annual subs. Six hundred quid just for the hire of a snooker table. But what if, like many a club member, I play four times a week.

I am not advocating driving the avid golfer off the course, but surely golf is an expensive game. It involves the upkeep of a vast expanse of sports turf and if someone wishes to spend their life on it they should pay the appropriate dues. Besides, by charging a green fee to members, annual subscriptions could even be reduced and some members may actually pay less for their golf.

Now how did this peculiar state of affairs ever come about? Well, I have a theory. As we are all aware, golf in those far off days of the twenties was a game for the proverbial toff. Back in the days of PG Wodehouse and his daily shot of golf but at a higher price, the club’s revenue will be increased - to be spent no doubt with great foresight by the elected committee.

“But what about the potential champion, or the county captain who just happens to be a member, they need somewhere to hone their skills?” Well, of course there is the practice ground, that is the place to hone any latent talents they may have. Hopefully they do not practise on the course anyway.

In the second case, where the member continues to get his daily shot of golf but at a higher price, the club’s revenue will be increased – to be spent no doubt with great foresight by the elected committee.

“Ah! But what about the golfer who merely requires a bit of exercise in his retirement?” you may argue. “Surely it would be a sin to expect him to pay the additional fee?” Well, if the committee is worried about being labelled the slayers of the frail and needy, may I suggest a bit of diplomacy. A reduction for the odd minority group would be a tactful decision under certain circumstances.

I am not advocating a huge green fee for all members that would result in mass resignations, simply a change to a fairer system. I believe that all reasonably perceptive individuals were not considered a problem. Annual subscriptions would result in improved course conditions, reduced maintenance costs and quicker, more enjoyable rounds. Alternatively, the powers that be may decide to make up for this shortfall in golf by introducing more members, thereby eating into the waiting list and increasing revenue.

In the first case, the course will be significantly less busy. This will result in improved course conditions, reduced maintenance costs and quicker, more enjoyable rounds. Alternatively, the powers that be may decide to make up for this shortfall in golf by introducing more members, thereby eating into the waiting list and increasing revenue.

Now before I am tarred, feathered and expelled from the electorate.

“But what about the potential champion, or the county captain who just happens to be a member, they need somewhere to hone their skills?” Well, of course there is the practice ground, that is the place to hone any latent talents they may have. Hopefully they do not practise on the course anyway.

Golf doesn’t have to be prohibitively expensive, in fact for many it should be even cheaper that it is now. I do, however, believe that clubs ought to start recognising how popular golf has become and start changing to a fairer system of paying for it. 

Marc Haring is head greenkeeper at Camberley Heath Golf Club.