Farmers build course on tight budget

The developers of a new golf course in Robin Hood country have shown that it can be done without robbing anyone.

Will Laughton, one of the farmers behind the Rufford Park Golf Centre in Sherwood Forest, says they spent £350,000 building an 18-hole par 70 course, nine-hole short course and driving range. There is also a 2,300 sq ft clubhouse, which they have deliberately not gone over the top on. "I don't think much money is made in clubhouses," he told Greenkeeper International, pointing out that many recent development failures have been due to lavish clubhouses.

Mr Laughton says that golf course development is the last thing to enter without sufficient capital, but argues that a tight budget is more effective than having unlimited resources: "It means you have to work with the land, rather than against it."

Mr Beall of Johnsons Seeds, who have been involved with the project from day one, confirms this approach: "I was given two targets: get the seed mixture right and get the price right."

The course, which opens to members in July and other users in August, is built on sandland so Mr Beall looked for grasses that were compatible with the indigenous grasses of the area and which would be resistant to drought.

He says construction consultant David Coussells of Milton Keynes (who worked on the two courses at Woburn) did an excellent job, as did Beall.

"I could have purchased my seed anywhere but I required technical advice throughout the project. Duncan Beall didn't cost anything but in retrospect I would have been willing to pay for his services or to pay more for the seed."

Will Laughton says that in contrast there are some professionals around who work to a formula that doesn't allow for the natural characteristics of a site. "Farmers may not necessarily know much about golf courses but they do know about land."

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