Jeremy Pilcher, Course Manager at Copt Heath Golf Club in Solihull, describes the background and work that went into producing their superb new greenkeeping facility...

Copt Heath Golf Club was formed in 1907, with the great Harry Vardon invited to contribute towards the laying out of the 18-hole course. In 1912 Harry Colt, the prominent golf course architect, made an inspection of the course and advised on what could be done to develop the existing layout. Over the next 20 years he would return to Copt Heath on several occasions to upgrade and improve on the layout.

Following the war, during which land was used for farming purposes, the firm of F G Hawtree and Son was given the job of reconstructing the course. In 1934 an opportunity to purchase Longdon Hall and its farm with 91 acres arose, this land adjoined the golf course and a decision was made to proceed with the purchase. Sometime in the mid 60s a milking parlour that had served the farm was converted to be used for greenkeeping use.

Over the next 35 years or so this building remained little changed, and during that time boused the greenkeepers and their machinery in increasing discomfort.

During 1998 two things happened, one was the club decided that new greenkeeping facilities were overdue and the second was a new Course Manager was appointed.

The latter half of 1998 an architect was appointed to design with the help and input of the greenstaff a completely new greenkeeping building that would meet our requirements for many years to come.

The siting of new buildings can often be a difficult decision, in our case we were already well situated with our present building as it sits almost in the middle of the course.

As things turned out our new building was actually erected just two metres from the end of the existing building. The initial drawings produced by the architect were based upon what we thought would be the most practical use of space and movement in and out of the building.

This resulted in a building approximately 30m x 30m in total with a block constructed of brick attached to one end which would house such things as a office, mess room and showers/drying room.

The main building would be constructed of brick and cladding over a steel frame. From our point of view this would be a very practical building and would easily house our machinery plus allow an expansion room for additional machinery. It would allow space for a fully equipped workshop and stores room.

Looking back we may have been a bit naive to think that the local planning office would allow such a building on what is greenbelt land and within the vicinity of Longdon Hall which by this time had acquired a Grade 2 listing.

However, the plan was submitted in December 1998, the planning office advised the architect that the plans were to come before the planning meeting in January they would be turned down.

The club withdrew this application thereby saving the application fee which exceeded £2,000. Following extensive talks between the architect the club and planning officials guidelines were drawn up as to what the council would allow in terms of size of the building, the materials and the design of the building.

What planning officers had in mind was very far removed from our original ideas, they wanted to see something that when finished would resemble a group of farm buildings or stables, that in many ways would resemble the nearby barns and outbuildings attached to Longdon Hall.

As all this was going on we were still working out of the old milking parlour and preparing the course for such
things as The Peter McEvoy Trophy and holding the Regional Qualifying Round for The Open Championship. In the summer of 1999 Jim Tompkins, the architect, came back to us with his interpretation of the planners guidelines. The transformation was stunning! We now had before us a design that had been approved and surrounded by the conditions being encountered during the excavation or the foundations. This appeared to be a problem, apart from London supply.

One incident that could have being more serious occurred one weekend, two youths obtained the key to a rough terrain fork lift truck. After breaking their way out of the compound, they decided on a quick tour of the golf course via several greens. After being spotted by a member who then called the police, the abandoned ship, only to be apprehended by another member whose house overlooks the course.

The club after due consideration decided not to press charges, a decision also taken by the contractor.

These incidents did in no way hamper construction and as the end of October approached the building was nearing completion.

With the arrival of Autumn most of you will remember that signalled the start of the wettest autumn on record, this affected the final stages of construction to the extent that the underground petrol and diesel tanks due to be installed have had to be temporarily postponed.

Security of the site was always going to be a problem, apart from London Hall the site is fairly remote, during the construction phase several attempts to break in to site cabins and storage areas took place, unfortunately this also bought unwanted attention to our existing greenkeeping building.

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Also a new access road that has being partially constructed has had to be postponed. As I write this in February these and the landscaping of the grounds still await completion.

Putting those aside, we now have a superb building which houses all the equipment and staff in very comfortable and secure premises.

The time taken in the planning and development stage along with the input of all the green staff has paid off, we have ended up with a building to be proud of.