

THE LAST WORD

'THE DEMAND FOR GOLF' AND 'THE WAY FORWARD'

TWO important publications released by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club "The Demand for Golf" and "The Way Forward" will form the basis of every debate, study and decision about the financing and administration of the game over the next ten years.

It is of vital importance therefore that the main conclusions some of which appear to be inconclusive are studied carefully. **Greenkeeping Management** intends to do this by seriously reviewing the discussion document over the first six issues of the 1990's.

One of the obvious and least surprising conclusions in "The Demand for Golf" is the need for 700 additional 18 hole golf courses to be built in England and Northern Ireland over the next ten years.

During this period the rate of construction required to satisfy the demand must exceed the number of new golf courses built in the last 80 years. Nothing is impossible, except perhaps in the U.K.

The Swedes are set to double the number of their courses in the next five years (there are over 200 now). There are over 1,000 courses at an advanced stage of planning or under construction in Western Europe. However, the track record of successive governments towards sport generally, and golf in particular, merits no merit at all. Will that change?

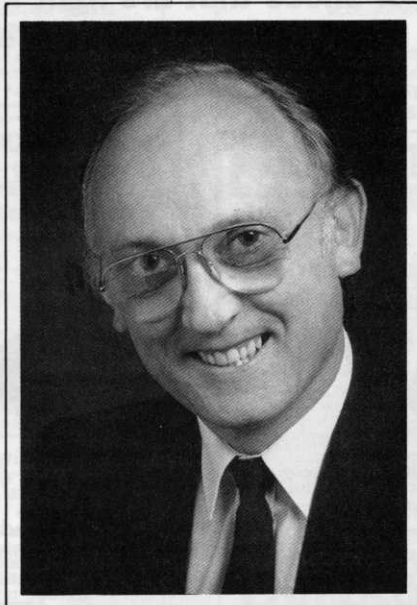
A National Golf Development Council (NGDC) has been suggested to "monitor and support" the unprecedented demand.

The 1990's will be an action decade for golf. It is time that Government, both central and local formally recognised the economic and social value of the game. The private sector can only meet about one third of the demand, but it is the public sector which controls all developments under planning laws. It is time that ministers, especially the Minister for Sport, took the lead, in developing golf's future. The NGDC should be actioned both to plan development and seek the very necessary financial support.

Turning to "The Way Forward" we find that with golf in this country having evolved "largely unplanned", the R & A recognise that "so much frustration and unhappiness is being generated among golfers and greenkeepers that we believe a planned approach to course management offers the way forward".

The 32-page document examines the component parts of the game and urges improvements by "a spirit of co-operation". There are sections on the authorities, clubs, greenkeepers, agronomists, architects, professionals, commerce, the media and the non golfing community and environmental considerations.

Greenkeeping Management will be looking at the issues in greater depth, but



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in highlighting a few points it is significant to note that the R & A feels "the national unions need to re-think their position with regard to the Sports Turf Research Institute and that it is unreasonable to expect R & A financial involvement to continue beyond the medium term." Equally the national unions need to consider their support for greenkeeper training through the Greenkeepers Training Committee. The present 2p levy towards greenkeeper training from each golf club member's subscription is clearly derisory. In visiting BIGGA's new headquarters to present the Toro Scholarship Award, Alex Hay as a media representative was astonished to learn of only a 2p levy to greenkeeper training and to hear that until 1988 there had been no contribution at all. Now, the R & A is urging a realistic first target of 50p per member rising to £1.

The document is scathing about the attitude of private clubs and sums up the position as follows: "In general terms, the Greens Committee suffers from precisely the same defects as the General Committee. An interest in gardening or farming is deemed as sufficient expertise to enable members to dabble in the running of the course."

This section goes on to state that the club structure represents "a most serious obstacle to meaningful progress".

The media rightly comes in for criticism. Measured against the miles of popular column, golf course management has rated an infinitesimal lineage. Recent inaccuracies about BIGGA's aims and, more importantly, its achievements during 1989 serve to provide justifiable criticism of the media generally.

In fact, it is "humble" greenkeepers who have taken matters by the scruff of the neck by publishing "Greenkeeping Management" which readers can be assured will present greenkeeping issues and BIGGA's plans and policies both factually and positively.

The Executive Director and the Board of Management are also singled out in "The Way Forward" for the tremendous work undertaken "to get BIGGA off the ground" with "considerable financial commitment from the R & A".

The R & A also quite clearly states that "British golf's historical attitude to greenkeeping (in marked contrast to America) has been - and still is in many cases, astonishingly disorganised, penny pinching and arrogant". With this Association members will heartily concur.

The R & A also admits that the Greenkeeper Training Committee (GTC) which consists of representatives of the four home golf unions, BIGGA, the PGA European Tour, the STRI, golf club secretaries and the colleges has done no more than mark time.

Outside of the golfing bodies, both central and local government need to be galvanised into action. In a recent local government expenditure survey the net cost to the tax payer of maintaining public golf courses did not exceed £3 million per annum whilst the cost of maintaining public parks and recreation areas exceeded £300 million per annum.

Local authorities are, of course, slowly realising the very valuable contribution made by golf, now a widely accepted non political sport for all. Golf courses can and should be a positive environmental factor and tend to be self financing. So why this relative inertia?

In many cities there are parks large enough to accommodate courses, driving ranges and beautiful gardens *et al*. Surely, it is both practical and politically expedient for an urgent and positive government review in these areas?

Greenkeeping Management can promise its readers that it will be active in pursuing greenkeeping interests and the enhancement of the profession and will lobby accordingly to these ends.

In terms of the immediate future, the Association will be preparing a considered response to "The Way Forward". Members are asked to submit their views and comments by December 31 to Headquarters Office whereupon the Executive Director will be preparing a report for the Board's consideration. Any member requiring a copy of the report should contact Headquarters Office.