



Blueprint for a new course

THE new South Course at the Wentworth Club, which is now under construction, is probably the best researched and most professional golf course project ever to be undertaken in the British Isles.

Far from being an 'overspill' course for existing East and West Courses, the South course concept is that it will become even more famous than the notorious Burma Road and will stage major PGA European Tour events very quickly.

The man who has masterminded the South Course project is the club's managing director Richard Doyle Davidson. In his planning he has enjoyed one major advantage in that Wentworth is a proprietary club, run on business principles and as such decision-taking is not burdened by the committee process.

To set the scene for the South Course development it is necessary to trace some of Wentworth's history. The Clubhouse and golf courses were for many years owned by Sir Lindsay Parkinson, construction and mining engineer and when this business was acquired by Fairclough Construction Ltd in 1974 the club and its courses changed hands. For some years the company appeared unsure as to what to do with Wentworth, but in

1979 they sent Richard Doyle Davidson, then the club's secretary on a visit to the USA as a marketing exercise. A report was prepared as to what was needed to improve Wentworth, but no commitment was made by the owners. In 1980 a parcel of land adjoining the courses came on to the market and as a result 240 acres of mainly woodland were purchased from the Greyhound Racing Association to protect the club and estate's boundaries. In 1984 Faircloughs amalgamated with another large company in the building industry, William Press, and formed AMEC plc. Wentworth Club Ltd. then became one of forty two subsidiary companies within the group.

The new owners commissioned a study on Wentworth's future and came to the conclusion that there were three options open to them.

1. To do nothing - in which case club, course and owners suffered.
2. Sell - perhaps to another company more usually associated with the leisure industry.
3. Do something to upgrade existing facilities and to expand in order to increase revenues and produce a greater return.

Previously there had been two attempts by different developers to gain planning permis-

sion on the 240 acre south site these were for a golf centre, housing, as well as a golf course. These plans had failed, with the local authority turning them down flat, on the grounds that the site was in the greenbelt and also formed a local amenity for walkers and riders.

AMEC having considered their study as to the options on Wentworth's future came to the conclusion that an additional golf course was required to alleviate pressure on the existing two, that members of the club required better facilities both on and off the course where they were tired of competing with visiting societies, and that as golf in the UK is a seven month business, from May-October, additional facilities would have to be offered by way of a leisure centre to ensure year-round income. The company forecast a return of the capital employed over a 6-7 year period.

However the track record was not good, the site for the golf course was in the greenbelt, residents of the estate did not want additional traffic, the club members were not happy and all manner of local conservation groups were against the project as they wished the Great Wood as the site was known to remain untouched.

Despite these apparent



The drive at the South Course's 16th with the centre tree remaining

insurmountable odds Richard Doyle Davidson set about assembling a highly professional team to win over the objectors. His plans were not only thorough but can be regarded as a blueprint for any club considering extending their course in these ecologically sensitive days.

A survey of the site was commissioned and from this the chosen golf course architect, John Jacobs, with consultants Gary Player and Bernard Gallacher, made their plans.

Obviously most of the objectors felt that a golf course, by removing trees and introducing cultivation, would damage the local flora and fauna. Richard Doyle Davidson approached Dr. David Parker of Liverpool University's Environmental Advisory Unit to produce a report on the affect that a new course would have on the environment. The report, it must be stressed, could have gone either way, as Dr. Parker was totally impartial.

In his final report, a most comprehensive study, Dr. Parker concluded "Although the Great Wood to Knowle Hill woodland has biological values, as have all woodlands, the study has shown that only two areas are of sufficient scientific interest to merit their complete conservation within the proposed development. These are the

western part of the Great Wood and the beechwood area of Knowle Hill.

The alder and birch carr woodland and the western edge of the Great Wood is of high scientific value and is the only part of the site known to have been wooded for longer than 150 years. The beechwood of Knowle Hill, although planted, is also of considerable biological importance. The complete retention of these areas within a sympathetic golf course

design will ensure that the majority of the biological value of these areas is unlikely to be diminished by the construction of an adjacent golf course." The conclusions also covered the retention of certain specimen trees on the site, that the biological balue of the East course was high as it supports heathland, woodland and grassland, and that the proposed South course would



Heathland on the 9th hole



be similar and would allow a wide diversity of plants and animals to flourish. Finally it was proposed that the EAU should continue to be involved with the golf course design in order to ensure that the most ecologically sympathetic proposals would be achieved. Now armed with an independent report suggesting that the proposed golf course could only do good, Mr Doyle Davidson appointed a planning consultant, someone who was fully acquainted with local planning authorities and regulations to guide the company's application through the various planning committees.

Next came a video. Amongst the Wentworth members was a PR director of a large advertising agency who, together with a number of his colleagues, produced a video making the case for the proposed new course. On the video Chris Denham, B.B.C. S.W. presenter, interviewed Renton Laidlaw the golf correspondent of the *London Evening Standard* who pointed out the need for additional golfing facilities; John Jacobs who confirmed that his design would enhance the area; Dr. Parker who also confirmed that the affect on the flora and fauna would be beneficial, and Richard Doyle Davidson who calmed the fears of the estate residents and members. The video presentation was made to

some 30 interested groups and it contributed greatly to the ultimate success, a professional tool for a professional approach.

The majority of the objectors, having seen the evidence and received the company's presentation of the facts, withdrew. The planning committee of Runnymede Borough Council agreed to the plan with one caveat, that an ecological management committee be formed to produce a ten year management plan for the site. This committee comprising representatives from the Borough Council, Wentworth residents association, the EAU of Liverpool University, the Surrey Wildlife Trust, the golf course architects and the Wentworth Club Ltd. with Richard Doyle Davidson appointed chairman. Having drawn up a routing plan for

the golf in conjunction with the architects and Dr. Arthur Linley of the Surrey Wildlife Trust, Mr. Doyle Davidson presented this to the management committee who endorsed the scheme. The Runnymede planning authorities also approved both management plan and planning application.

The route of the course was then marked out with tape and scrub cleared to a width of 50 yards. The trees that were to remain in these 'playing areas' were marked and the tree clearance programme started in the autumn of 1987.

The site is now ready for the golf course constructors, Golf Landscapes, to move in and start shaping and building. Details of the design and construction will form the basis of the next article in this series.



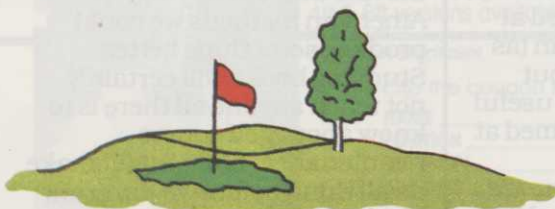
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