

GREENSIDE COMMENT

OUT AND ABOUT

As a European Golf industry publication it is right and proper that we should bask in the reflected glory of Nick Faldo's retention of the Master's Green Jacket at Augusta. Not only did he create a little more golf history, but this is now the third successive year that a British golfer has been crowned king of world golf and the fifth European victory in the past eight years.

If a few more facts are required to press home the increasing dominance of European golf, Faldo's caddy, Fanny Sunesson is a Swede, the first woman to carry the winner's bag in a major championship and the Augusta course was designed in partnership with Bobby Jones, by Dr Alister McKenzie, who cut his teeth on golf course architecture in Yorkshire.

All this glory, can only create one result, a demand for more golf courses, which in Britain at least is highly unlikely to be met. After all it was watching Jack Nicklaus winning the Masters on TV in 1972 that inspired a 14 year old sport mad Faldo to persuade his parents it was the game he wanted to play.

Just how many potential Faldo's, with drive, determination and potential ability have been similarly spurred to emulate his performance by the end of the century?

Which leads us logically into "The Demand for Golf," the document from the R & A, examining the present facilities, area shortages and recommending ways and means for the construction of more golf courses.

That sufficient land is available cannot be in dispute, what is more of a steeple-chase fence, than a hurdle to be overcome, is the attitude of planners and nearby residents to the change in land usage.

The mere mention of a rural golf course plan is certain to inflame local councillors, aided and abetted by self appointed custodians of environmental protection, whose out-cries are often only thinly disguised excuses for maintaining their private outlooks over an uneconomic pasture, inhabited by a few sheep.

The objections, when analysed, are often not against the golf course *per se*, but the fear that the club-house and the rest of the infrastructure to include a couple of acres of tarmac car parking will become a gross intrusion into the country dweller's cocooned existence.

There is also the potential threat, real or imaginary, that once planning permission has been granted for the golf course, how long will it be before the developer slides in another application for residential prop-

erty, diluting even further their isolation from fellow man.

If there is to be an increase in playing facilities it can only come about in one of three ways. From the large scale developer, who is out to make a substantial profit from an hotel or housing, the farmer with financial resources to launch his own private club, or existing membership clubs expanding their present set-up with a further nine or 18 holes.

Local authorities, particularly now they are funded by the poll-tax rather than the rates, are not in the market to build new municipal courses, rather it is likely that existing lay-outs will be sold off to the private sector.

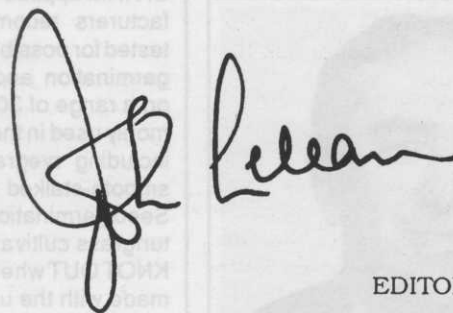
There are around 300 applications in the pipe-line according to the rather vague statistics available. Vague, because there is no compulsion on planning officers to notify a central coordinating body, though the English Golf Union have formed a golf development committee and would welcome information from all sources.

What is desperately needed is a greater understanding, not only how golf courses can enhance the environment, but a change of attitude away from conservative selfishness, which denies the right of outdoor enjoyment to others.

Into that category falls the private club member, now reaping the benefits of a legacy from the club's founders, often at a fraction of the true cost, who is totally opposed to extending his golf course for future generations.

The Nature Conservancy Council, with financial support from the R & A, have published a most beautifully illustrated book "On Course Conservation" - managing golf's natural heritage. Having been distributed to all UK golf clubs, it is available from The Nature Conservancy Council, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA at a cost of £ 7.50 (post free).

This will be of use to any developer, planner or club manager no matter where they are situated in Europe as it gives a clear message as to how a golf course can improve the environment, flora and fauna.



EDITOR