

Hawaii sheds grass skirt mentality...

Forget the soft Hollywood image of grass-skirted hip swinging maidens – politicians in Hawaii, America's tourist-trap capital, are proving to be as hard-nosed as any when it comes to making an easy extra buck.

Hawaii's relatively close proximity to Japan has made it a target for Japanese golf course investment and the politicians recognise a good thing when they see it. Although proposed legislation has yet to be officially passed, some Japanese developments have already given a polite bow of approval to charges to be levied on golf course developers which could bring huge returns – billions rather than millions – to Hawaii, in the euphemistically titled Community Impact fees. Sums in excess of \$200 million were agreed by just one company to get approval to build two private members clubs. If we British question the thinking behind the casual acceptance of such unseemly extravagance, remember that golf-hungry Japanese are happily paying around \$100,000 for memberships, which can then be traded on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, just like shares in Sony or Toyota.

... but closer to home

If the smart though ever-so-slightly fishy scheme concocted by the Hawaiian parliamentarians has you wondering what skulduggery might be cooking on our own

doorsteps; consider the following:

Such is the concern regarding so called 'sweeteners' – the practice of firms paying for such as old peoples homes, wild-life parks, village by-passes, even agreeing to double-glaze a council estate in exchange for planning permissions – that the Government is to investigate this practice, which is recognised as being completely out of hand.

Typically, it seems, a council will suggest that planning permission is forthcoming only to hedge after a firm has committed labour and materials for the project. When actually confronted, the authority might suggest a project on their own 'shopping list' and a deal is then struck. The tactic, described by one eminent planning professor as "sometimes amounting to blackmail", is a festering sore.

Green-watching as we do, we are totally in favour of the trend for turning surplus farming land into golf courses but note that Department of the Environment guidelines recently issued suggest that golf courses should not now be built on SSSI's (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) or AONB's (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

With opposition escalating to the growth of golf, certainly new golf, and with so many official sticky fingers in the honeypot, one wonders how long it will be before golf course developers are 'persuaded' to include little 'Extra's'? On the premise that nothing's for nothing in the business world, the poor old end user – the golfer – may well foot this final bill.

Agenda – The ITV programme which looks at political decisions affecting the South and South East – took on the role of campaigning for reasoned thinking with regard to new golf course applications when featuring our own John Millen recently. John appeared in his role of designer at the new Weald of Kent Golf Course and demonstrated in his inimitable fashion the thinking that has gone into this new and exciting pay and play complex. Viewers were treated to a brief lesson in the psychology of playing shots over water and shown an impressive image of John's swing – albeit without the benefit of club or ball!



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