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Supply and demand

mainly to Germans and Scandinavians – often high hand-cappers – who take in excess of four hours to complete a motorised round and are quite willing to part with large sums for the privilege. However, even in Spain the bubble appears to have burst – as both hoteliers and golf Clubs have found to their cost – and there are many new ventures 'on hold' awaiting financial investment.

The other main problem facing the industry is perhaps even more damaging. I refer to the actual construction and specifications used in creating these new courses. All too often courses are built too quickly by inexperienced contractors, attempting to meet project deadlines and oblivious of those who must follow to maintain such 'creations'. Contractors are often too severe and reveal scant regard for future maintenance, as also do green surrounds that are often an afterthought, with bunkers having more in common with front line trenches. Materials used in green construction are seldom properly tested for particle size, porosity and bulk density, with sub-standard local soil mixed with sand from the nearest gravel pit often being used in the mistaken belief that this saves time and money. It is little wonder that seed-take is poor and 'ponding' and compaction occurs so readily after play begins, resulting in the use of temporary greens on a brand new course!

Once the 'architect' and contractors have been handsomely rewarded and have headed off to another site, the onus for solving these problems falls upon the shoulders of the poor greenkeeper. Sadly, this scenario is all too common and still continues to be the case up and down the country. Even with the availability of modern technology and research there are probably more badly constructed courses now than ever before. It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that at least one client is attempting to sue his contractor for failing to deliver the goods. In most instances these problems could easily have been averted by using qualified personnel and seeking proper advice in the first place. All

materials need to be laboratory tested to meet necessary criteria, with designs critically examined to assess their suitability.

Perhaps there is a need to look beyond our shores for guidance as to the direction our beloved game is heading. In France, 75% of all new courses are aimed at the public sector and built at an appropriate cost. Even in the USA there are very many more public courses per head of population compared with the UK, with most playable for a very modest dollar output indeed. The real need in this country is for more low-cost public or pay as you play courses, offering membership at realistic cost, as well as numerous par three and nine hole courses which would encourage family participation or the occasional leisurely evening round. Both architects and developers should turn the clock back and stop trying to emulate Augusta National or Pine Valley!

St Andrews is a shining example of how this may be achieved; namely courses that may be enjoyed by every standard of golfer. Courses do not need to cost several millions to build, nor do they need the tag 'championship' listed in their sales brochure. A well drained course, including properly constructed greens and tees and capable of accommodating at least 40,000 rounds each year and offering a moderate test of golf can be built for under £1 million, inclusive of irrigation to greens and tees. The course should also be capable of relatively quick and efficient maintenance within a modest budget, which can then be reflected in the cost to the golfer.

There will of course always be a need for a few 'up-market' country Clubs, but they should be minimal and built only to satisfy a genuine need. If the average golfer is not to be 'priced out' of the game, there must be a realism attached to the direction in which the game is heading. Only then can we claim that the real 'Demand for Golf' is being met.

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Greenkeepers forced to go back to basics as pesticide products dry up

Once upon a time there was a reasonable choice of pesticide products available to the greenkeeper. Though new products were always slow in appearing, the big agricultural producers made available some of their new products for the smaller specialist companies to develop for the turf market and there was always regular dialogue; with products being granted back-to-back registration. With others, some interesting joint development programmes were undertaken.

With ever tightening budgets for development and the increasing demand for more information about efficacy and safety from MAFF for Approval purposes, products nevertheless came onto the amenity market, slowly but surely. Quite rightly, the emphasis is now on having products that are as environmentally friendly as possible and on them being applied through more accurate machinery.

But what has happened? Has the amenity sector been abandoned because of its traditional low demand for pesticides? We seem to be going into reverse, with products being

discontinued because of the non-availability of raw materials, together with mysterious periods of product shortages due to 'supply difficulties'.

The weeds, worms and diseases are not going to go away, in fact there are indications of an increase in the number of problems occurring, especially in grass grown on special cultural media and 'foreign' grass mixtures. Where are all the new bio-control agents developed for use in turf? We hear of great strides being made in bio-control in commercial horticulture and if *Bacillus thuringiensis* is now commercially viable as a product to control caterpillars, I must ask where is the work to evaluate a similar product to control chafer grubs in turf?

If amenity horticulture is not a viable market for the development of new specialist products that will be environmentally acceptable, I would like to hear from those who might have been in a position to help but won't or can't, possibly because the 'big boys' will not make their products available.

Is there a more sinister side to this conundrum? Some of the big chemical producers

are on the other side of the channel and one wonders if they are aiming to strangle our very important small, indeed some not so small, specialist producers and create a monopoly situation after 1992?

The real worry in all this is that the enterprising greenkeeper may well be forced to revert to practices of many years ago to control pests and diseases. Already we hear talk of some that are using home-made remedies or using approved products for non-approved purposes.

It is sad to see these potentially dangerous and illegal practices creeping back in a profession that elsewhere is raising standards to new heights.

So come on, let's hear it from the manufacturers – what are you doing to help the greenkeeper? Or have you abandoned us and are without the courage to say so?

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