



Duncan Beall, left and Will Laughton discuss the progress of the 17th tee at Rufford Park Golf Centre

Farmers build course on tight budget

The developers of a new golf course in Robin Hood country have shown that it can be done without robbing anyone.

Will Laughton, one of the farmers behind the Rufford Park Golf Centre in Sherwood Forest, says they spent £350,000 building an 18-hole par 70 course, nine-hole short course and driving range. There is also a 2,300 sq ft clubhouse, which they have deliberately not gone over the top on. "I don't think much money is made in a clubhouse," he told Greenkeeper International, pointing out that many recent development failures have been due to lavish clubhouses.

Mr Laughton says that golf course development is the last thing to enter without sufficient capital, but argues that a tight budget is more effective than having unlimited resources: "It means you have to work with the land, rather than against it."

Duncan Beall of Johnsons Seeds, who have been involved with the project from day one, confirms this approach: "I was given two targets: get the seed mixture right and get the price right."

The course, which opens to members in July and other users in August, is built on sandland so Mr Beall looked for grasses that were compatible with the indigenous grasses of the area and which would be resistant to drought.

To meet Mr Laughton's demands, Johnsons Seeds found it necessary to make some compromises but Mr Beall says this did not cause him concern. "We worked together and came up with the right mixture at a realistic price."

With input from the Sports Turf Research Institute, Mr Beall opted for fescue/bent fairways, using a good proportion of Jupiter slender

creeping red fescue for drought tolerance and fine leaves.

The course is now complete and Will Laughton and his brother Bruce (who is in charge of course maintenance following some private tuition in greenkeeping) are entirely satisfied with the result. "We researched all over the world before embarking on this project and quickly came to the view that if there was anything we didn't understand, we would pay for professional advice," said Will Laughton.

He says construction consultant David Coussells of Milton Keynes (who worked on the two courses at Woburn) did an excellent job, as did Beall.

"I could have purchased my seed anywhere but I required technical advice throughout the project. Duncan Beall didn't cost anything but in retrospect I would have been willing to pay for his services or to pay more for the seed.

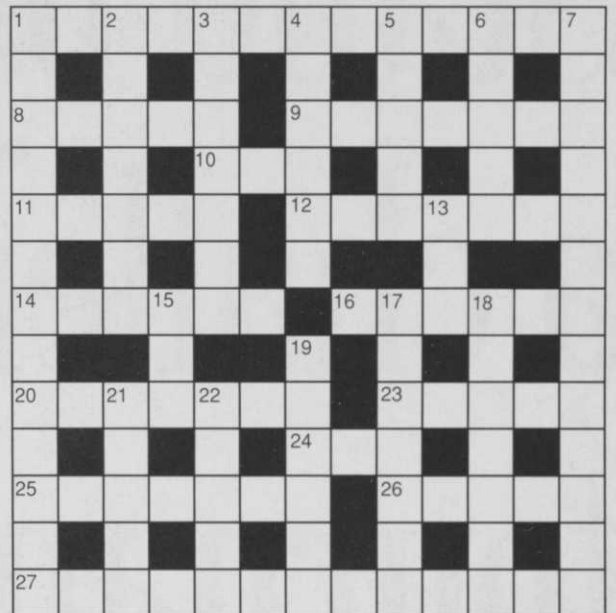
Will Laughton says that in contrast there are some professionals around who work to a formula that doesn't allow for the natural characteristics of a site. "Farmers may not necessarily know much about golf courses but they do know about land."

Rufford Park has achieved its budgeted membership of 500 and will be looking at playing patterns before deciding whether to accept more members.

There is a trend for public courses to act as feeders to more expensive private clubs. However, the Laughtons hope to break the mould by providing facilities that match the best that private clubs can offer. The head greenkeeper is Peter Hunter, who is working on his first golf course but was chosen because of his man management and motivation skills.

GREENKEEPER'S CROSSWORD

Compiled by Mark G Smith, assistant at Frilford Heath GC



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CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Golf competitions beyond the level of tournaments (13)
- 8 Calibrated straight edge in the workshop (5)
- 9 Obtained precisely the best terms for supplies (7)
- 10 Previous name of the Saltex trade exhibition (abbrev.). (1,1,1)
- 11 Hale winner of the 1990 US Open (5)
- 12 GC, Edmond, Oklahoma, venue of the 1988 USPGA Championship (3-4)
- 14 Initial effect of close mowing and drought on fine turf grass (6)
- 16 The Lapwing or Plover (L. Vanellus Vanellus) (6)
- 20 Fertilisers may do it slowly or quickly (7)
- 23 White (L. Cupressus Thyoides) (5)
- 24 Governing body of golf based at The Scores, St Andrews, Fife (abbrev.) (1,1,1)
- 25 Corporate sponsors of the USLPGA Dinah Shore Classic (7)
- 26 Olin US Open Champion in 1934
- 27 How striping patterns render greens and fairways! (4,2,7)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Last player to achieve back to back wins in the US Open (6,7)
- 2 Blooming (7)
- 3 Grass clippings. Two-balls we hear! (7)
- 4 Portland CC, Portland, venue of the 1946 USPGA Championship (6)
- 5 A plant stem (5)
- 6 Bury or cover with earth (5)
- 7 Outcome of excessive rainfall (6,7)
- 13 Overall result of the 1969 Ryder Cup Match (3)
- 15 A spring of water to watch (3)
- 17 Local currency in which the winner of the Portuguese Open may be paid (7)
- 18 Ideal driving area to spread wear (4,3)
- 19 To play a provisional ball (stang) (2-4)
- 21 Broad and usually rounded segmental divisions of a leaf (5)
- 22 A Golf Club's staff are its greatest despite never appearing on a Balance Sheet (5)

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Winner of the March crossword was David Goodchild, first assistant at Ellesborough GC, Aylesbury, who selected a blazer as his prize.

Winner of the April competition was Elliott Small, course manager at Tulliallan GC, Kin-cardine on Forth, who also chose a blazer.

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HARDPAN VISOR
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