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Working

Making alternations to a golf course is much easier when everyone works together as a team.

Unlike many art forms golf courses are living things. Of course, we know the playing characteristics change with the seasons and the weather but they also differ in other ways to the extent that they rarely ever remain exactly the same as the original architect's design.

Nature dictates that trees grow, changing the look of holes while others have man made alterations – extended or shortened, bunkers added, greens altered, always with a view to refining the original golfing challenge. All this, coupled with less than repetitive natures of most players swings, ensure the only time, unlike the accurate Ben Hogan who was reputed to achieve the feat with regularity, players tend to play from their own divot marks is when the first effort has failed to move the ball.

Golf Course architects are a singularly thick skinned lot and don't seem to mind others tampering with their handiwork. Can you imagine Da Vinci's response to being told that the committee had decided that the Mona Lisa's dopey grin was to be replaced by something more sultry and they'd called in Rembrandt to do the work? Or Beethoven's on being told that the committee had asked Noel Gallagher to rework the middle eight in his Ninth Symphony. Personally I don't think they'd be over the moon. But I'm fairly sure Alister McKenzie would be quite pleased if he saw the way Augusta National now looks or that Harry Colt would appreciate changes made to the West Course at Wentworth.

However, amendments are not just made to the elite golf clubs, it's something which members' clubs have done for many years and now, particularly with the VAT windfall, it is an avenue more clubs have the wherewithal to attempt.

Such a club is East Herts, which has shown that by employing a professional architect and contractor and then working closely with them and the green-keeping team seemingly wide

ranging work can be carried out without closing the course and to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

A total of 52 bunkers were involved – remodelling existing ones and putting in seven brand new ones.

"Most of the existing ones have been reshaped because of the amount of sand caused by the banks on them. They just swallowed up vast quantities of sand and that is very difficult to maintain," explained Ian Scott Taylor, the architect charged with completing with the work in concert with constructor, Cousell Associates Ltd, Head Greenkeeper Bill Sparrow, his team and the members.

"There will be 47 sand bunkers in total the rest of which are grass hollows. The thought behind it is to introduce more strategy into the golf course to make the member think about what he is going to do around the course and to improve course management for the greenkeeper as well. That was the brief that East Herts gave us to work to and I believe it has worked very well."

The fact that the relationship with the club, its members and the professionals was so good speaks volumes for the way the job was tackled because, let's face it, putting in bunkers is a little like getting the job of putting up taxes – you wouldn't expect to win many popularity contests.

"A member said the other day. We must be the only club in the country to spend £100,000 putting in things which no member wants! You can't give him an argument really," said Ray York, a member of the Green Committee and a man whose work on the project has been so well appreciated he's had a new bunker on the 1st named after him!

The course was originally designed and constructed by the members and their own green staff when the club was relocated 20 years ago and the quality of the layout is a credit to all involved.

"The old course was a figure eight and we wanted to retain that concept here and this site automatically lent itself to that design again," said Ray.

The bunkers at the new East

in harmony...



Ian Scott Taylor, left, and Bill Sparrow, right, with two members of Cousell Associates Ltd construction team

Herts course were more or less a copy of those at the old course.

"The general feeling was that after 20 years our bunkers were old fashioned and didn't fit in with what they had everywhere else.

"The shaping of them was unfair. In certain times of the year if ball ran in to within 12 inches of the back of the bunker you didn't have a shot. Our plan

was to enhance them and bring them up to latter day design," said Ray.

The club decided to put its VAT money to good use and decided on this occasion to commission a professional architect.

The Green's Committee quickly saw the benefits of bringing in professionals to do the work.

"Because the members know we have a professional golf archi-

tect on the job we've been able to put in new bunkers which weren't on the original plan. They've gone in and we've had very little problem because the members know they are being done by someone who knows what he is talking about and not Charlie Bloggs from the club who's decided to pop one in there. That has been a terrific help," said Ray.

"My first impressions of the course were that it didn't need a lot doing to it. The members had done an excellent job of routing the golf course. I couldn't have done a better job myself to be honest but it just needed tweaking here and there," said Ian.

"We came back with some proposals and we all went through them with Bill Sparrow. I gave my thinking on each bunker and discussed them all in detail. The good thing about this is that it's been a team effort all the way round. It just proves that the golf architect, constructor, can work with the greens committee and the greenkeeper as a team."

The old adage about a camel being a horse designed by committee was avoided because there was no doubt where the buck stopped.

"The casting vote is with the architect. The buck stops with him and he's got to balance all the opinions of the constructor, greenkeeper and the committee. It has not always been a bed of roses we have had our points of contention on one or two bunkers and I have had to say enough's enough and that is what we are going to do."

Work began on January 29 and was completed by the middle of May in time for a big pro-am at the club in July.

To speed the process all work was being turfed not seeded to come back into early play as soon as possible. David Cousell visited the site twice a week to coordinate the work with his full time on site team, Bill and his team.

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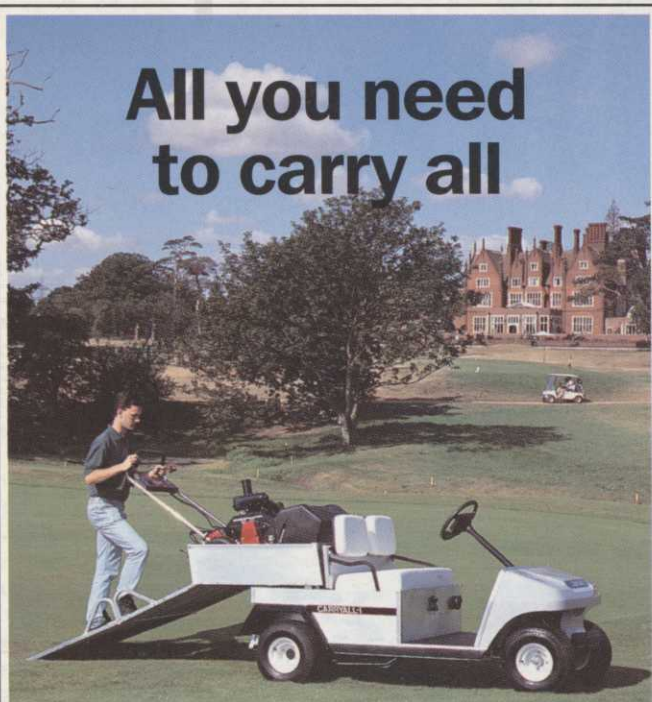
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The 17th with three new bunkers guarding the right side of the fairway

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my programme I'll be able to blend the aprons in with the ride on triple when I go around the surrounds. I think it is cutting it down the maintenance of the bunkers." Previously when it rained the sand is some of the bunkers used to be washed down.

"It looked horrible and I would have to ask staff make sure they shove it back. Another benefit will be that not so much sand will be thrown onto the greens damaging them, smothering them and getting into the cutters. The whole appearance of the courses should be enhanced with the bunkering," said Bill.

The work at East Herts shows that extensive work can be carried out while the course remains open and the benefits of working closely with the professional team engaged to do the work.

"We have been very lucky at East Herts because the committee has been very progressive in the way it has looked at things. We can talk to, and reason with, them and we have respected their opinion and they have respected our professional opinion," explained Ian.

"While the work has been going on we've not had any problem with stopping play. I've been in daily communication with the construction team and we've been able to talk problems get round it one way and another avoid disruption on the course," said Bill.

He will also benefit from the style of the new bunkers which have been installed.

"The new style bunkers will save on maintenance time and it will give me more time to do work on other parts of the course.

We will have one or two bunkers which we will still have to fly mow but once I've got into

MY AMBITION IS...



"To learn to play this silly little game of golf properly"
Richard Saunders, St Neots GC