

**Derek Farrington, South East Regional Administrator chats to some of his members about the difficulties they encountered when new roads were routed through their golf courses...**

# The price of roads

If you are from north of London and heading for the continent on a holiday, a 'booze cruise' or even the golfing paradise of the Kent links courses, there is a fair chance that you will take the M25 and then head for the coast and ports of Kent along the A2/M2.

After a few miles along this motorway, on the right hand side you will get your first glimpse of a golf course, Rochester and Cobham Park, a fine course dating back to 1891.

From that part of the A2 where you can see the course, you are now travelling over what was the 18th green, one of the first casualties to the development of our road system in this part of Kent, for the course had to be re-designed to allow for the dualing of the then A2 during the 60s. You can also see the

building that served as a very fine Clubhouse until a few years ago, but more of this golf course later on.

This area of North Kent has seen massive investment in road development over the past few years, mainly to enable us to convey goods and people quickly and easily to and from our trading partners on the Continent. One such investment has been the A299 which has now opened large stretches of motorway quality road around the Herne Bay/Whitstable area.

Driving along this road will take you under a tunnel some 300 yards long. Above you will be Chestfield Golf Club. That tunnel, the road development and the consequential work load has been a real challenge to the Head Greenkeeper, Gary Mills, and his staff, at this course.

No doubt the Department of Transport, Kent County Council and the District Valuer have been very fair and generous to the Club in compensation to enable the Club to employ an architect to re-design and a contractor to carry out the work. In fact a large number of people not connected with the Golf Club have probably earned their living for their involvement with this particular project. Gary, in fact was given an extra member of staff to help cope with the extra work load. But as to compensation for the stress involved, I'm afraid not, that particular item does not appear in the equation for compensation. I use the word stress, for that is often the real word for what is euphemistically called a "Challenge"!

I'll not bore you with all the facts and figures at Chestfield. Suffice it to say that Gary had nine holes affected by the road works. As holes are altered, new greens and temporary greens have been constructed and as a result Gary now

Below: Rochester and Cobham Park during reconstruction







Right: Chesterfield Golf Course during the road construction

Below: Rochester and Cobham GC's splendid new clubhouse

has 26 greens to maintain for this 18 hole course. As work progresses he will of course end up with 18, but of those nine will be to USGA specification and the original nine will be old style on clay.

Before I left Chestfield, I returned to the tunnel. Work is soon to commence on seeding the top of it. At present the access road on it has been left in such a condition as to make it dangerous to take any machinery on to it. After it has "grown in" and tees have been constructed it will form part of a very formidable par 5 and perhaps will not be the only hole on the course where a tee-shot (like mine that can resemble a drive through extra cover) could put vehicles travelling the new road at considerable risk.

A considerable amount of Gary's stress has been caused by new areas (greens and fairways) being used far to soon. Members, however, have been very understanding, as has his Chairman of Green, who is only a voting member of the Golf Development Committee which makes most of the decisions. The main reason however that Gary has coped so well with all of these alterations to his course has been the support that he has had from his staff, who have worked long hours to keep the course in a playable condition whilst these works have been and are still going on.

Although this has only been about Chestfield Golf Club, Phil Hirst and his Staff, at Herne Bay Golf Club six miles along the same stretch of road have had the same sort of problems (and stress) to cope with, as have David Horne, at Sittingbourne and Milton Regis and Steve Johnstone, at Gillingham. No doubt many more Greenkeeping Staff throughout the country have been affected by this never ending policy of appeasement to the motor car.

Back to Rochester and Cobham Golf Club. As mentioned before the A2(M) is now routed over what was the 18th green. A few years later the Club built a splendid new Clubhouse alongside the newly widened A2. Then came the Channel Tunnel and the demand for a 'high speed rail link to the Continent. That's right - you've guessed it - through Rochester and Cobham Park Golf Course.

Barry Coveney is the Course Manager and he seems the sort to deal with stress very well. Fortunately. The first big change was that the splendid Clubhouse had to be re built. Right in the very spot that the Club had wanted it some years before but the Planners would not allow! The new building

is splendid, with a profusion of oak fittings that are beautiful. What was needed was nine new greens and rather than players having to play on greens of a different type (as at Chestfield) it was decided that although the compensation provided for the nine new ones the Club at its own expense would build all 18 greens to the same specification. Lucky Members!

Barry has been at Rochester and Cobham for over 20 years and appears to have taken all this work in his stride, and with one extra member of staff to cope with the increased work load has finished up with a magnificent golf course. I was lucky enough to play it with a Golf Society last year, and it really is a credit to him and

his Staff, the work now complete and now only the inconvenience of access, and road and rail works going on around him. The old Clubhouse is still there, being used as offices by Kent County Council and the contractors, McAlpines.

I suppose it is all very necessary, all the cost and all the work involved in the way that we pay homage to the motor car and the need to get everywhere in a hurry, but on reflection

I often wonder if it were possible to measure just how much money has been made by those involved and to what cost in stress to the Greenkeeper, who appears to have made not a penny more than his normal wage.

