

Constructive Advice

Roland Taylor dispenses some fine advice if you are thinking of undertaking any construction work

However natural a golf course appears it is still man made and is constantly subjected to both geological changes and the vagaries of the prevailing weather of the area in which it is located.



For some readers it is a continual battle against erosion and the forces of nature. Just one example of what can happen is a well known links course where the first tee had been lost to the sea on numerous occasions plus high tides regularly caused flooding. This type of problem is not common place but it does illustrate that when the course was first established (many moons ago) these types of possible problems were not taken into account. Closer to the present is the fact that throughout the 70s and 80s the big hype was that golf was about to take-off. Courses began appearing across the country like mushrooms as many thousands of acres of land, which had once grown cereals or provided fodder for cattle disappeared, to be replaced by fairways, tees and greens. This generated considerable business for the construction industry, but unfortunately like all situations where there is the slightest hint of money to be made it also attracted the cowboys. As a result some courses were not built to the high standards that they should have been. Eventually, sanity prevailed and

organisations sprang up designed to protect the clients/customers from the fly-by-nights. One such body was the British Association of Golf Course Constructors, which was formed at the end of the seventies. Its inception was as a result of increasing concern that people and companies were not maintaining standards regarding various disciplines within the golf course industry. The aim was, and still is to bring together like-minded people from companies who have high standards in all the disciplines relating to the building of courses. It is not one of those organisations where paying your dues automatically makes you a member. From the onset anyone joining had to be invited plus be able to satisfy their peers that their company could meet all the laid down standards. These include experience, professionalism and quality workmanship.

Twenty plus years on the present members of BAGCC are recognised as a formable source of specialist expertise when it comes to all aspects of golf course construction and its related activities. In addition, to the membership there are the



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associates. They play a vital role in the organisation and are made up of experts in many field and disciplines. Combined they have a wealth of knowledge spanning many years in wide range of subjects. Like the members these specialists are invited to join and their participation means that members have a readily available source of information and advice relating to their services and products. This is of considerable benefit not only to the membership, but also their clients and customers. The BAGCC has a code of ethics, which is rigorously upheld.

In recent years, full golf course construction has tailed off and a lot of the work now being carried out is of a replacement nature or modifications to parts of the course.

The game itself has also undergone considerable changes. The design and use of modern materials for clubs and balls, plus higher standards of play, have meant greater distances are being achieved than in the past. For some courses this may result in the replacement of existing tees or greens to provide a greater challenge.

One of the biggest changes is as a result of the present climatic conditions. Higher rainfall can result in an alteration of the water table level causing flooding, and the existing drainage systems could be inadequate to deal with a large influx of water. There is also the increasing problem of compaction, which adds to the difficulty of the removing surface water.

During the boom time dubious materials were used and suspect practises carried out on some projects - the results of these, can surface at any time.

If new construction is required there are guidelines that need to be addressed from the moment the decision is made to go ahead. In fact, some of these should be considered when the idea is first raised as a possible project.

The success or failure of any construction hinges on the planning. It is not just a question of "that is a good idea lets do it now". No doubt some readers have heard this type of comment when dealing with a greens committee. There will always be a number of questions that have to be answered before work begins. While the project satisfies club members requirements, how will it fit into the present course management programmes? Is it going to require specific needs and would this incur extra maintenance costs? This could



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certainly apply to a new green built to modern specifications, which is sited amongst older ones. Another factor that needs thorough investigation is, will any construction work effect the playing facilities? Disgruntled golfers may be a major problem and there is always the possibility they will go to other courses, thus depriving yours of revenue.

Once the decision has been made to go ahead it is then down to formulating and producing a design that encompasses all the requirements. Depending on the work to be carried out it is likely at this stage that specialist advice is necessary. The design must be specific and leave no room for any misunderstandings. The plans should include key information and details of any existing drainage, irrigation systems and other service facilities such as electric and water supplies.

As the site is likely to be in the vicinity of sensitive ground surfaces access routes for bring in materials and equipment need to be clearly shown so any damage to the turf or ground is minimal. In instances where the work is being carried out close to buildings and there is the possibility of contact with the general public the contract needs to clearly show the contractors obligations and any safeguards necessary to protect him, the client and the general public.

It is now time to decide on a suitable contractor and as already mentioned members of the BAGCC are the best starting points. While price, in most cases is going to play a major part in who is chosen there are other aspects that need to be taken into account. If the price difference between tendering companies is significantly large it requires a detailed explanation. Word of mouth is a good indicator of the

competence of a company, especially if the bottom-line figures are close.

Once the contractor has been appointment it is important to immediately establish a strong line of communication between all involved parties. This is critical if everything is to run smoothly and the work completed within the agreed time scale. The contractor should appoint an on-site manager who can be contacted at any time. Where the main contractor is employing sub-contractors then there needs to be an easily accessible representative of the main company whose responsibility it is to sort out any problems quickly and efficiently. By establishing this network before work commences, time, frustration and money can be saved should any difficulties occur.

The question arises regarding the materials used, it could be tempting to try and save money or use an alternative specification, but decisions of this nature can result in the failure of a construction project. If this situation occurs at a later date one will probably ask, why did I allow it to happen? Today, prices generally reflect what you are actually getting so a few pounds saved could very well create considerable hassle in the future.

All materials used should be regularly check. If a shipment of turf arrives, ensure it is at the same standard as the original samples and to the correct specifications that was ordered. By used well-known established suppliers, while not a hundred percent foolproof increases the chance of it being close. The marketplace is highly competitive, so it is in a company's interest to ensure customer satisfaction.



SUMMARY

- Draw up comprehensive plans and specifications.
- Select a contractor who has a very good track record for the type of work required.
- Use the best quality materials possible.
- Work out with the contractor, schedules that are achievable for the work to be completed within the time scale, taking into account possible variations in climatic and ground conditions.

- Ensure there is constant supervision of all the work carried out during the construction.
- Where work is being done 'in house' ensure any equipment hired or bought will do the work efficiently and is reliable.

One of the secrets of success of any contract is for the client's representatives, consultants and contractor to become a working team that regularly communicate with each other. The project then has every chance of being carried out efficiently, to the standards the clubs requires and within the budget and time scale. The whole operation is less frustrating and stressful - on completion everyone walks away satisfied.

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