



# THE LIE OF THE LAND

*James Lane offers some helpful advice to improve the landscaping of your golf course.*

**The construction or renovation of a golf course is a major investment for any club or developer. Through thorough planning with the architect in the design phase, the owners of the new facility can end up with a truly sustainable course that has been built using the natural terrain and resources that already exist on site. Choosing a good construction company with a proven history of utilising these natural features and build to the design specification is a must.**

Turning a 2D plan into a 3D course is a real art. Analysis and then implementation of plans drawn up by an architect is key to fulfilling the final specification and making the most of what already exists. Shipping in many tonnes of extra material to build a highly contoured course is not deemed as carbon friendly in this modern age of “being green”, nor is it cost effective and does not lend to being sustainable. The R&A themselves define the sustainability of golf courses in terms of development and management as “optimising the playing quality of the golf course in harmony with the conservation of its natural environment under economically sound and socially responsible management”. This seems logical, but how many courses built in boom years of the 1980s and 90s considered the environment and the effects of

this construction on the surrounding landscape? Very few, one would imagine.

Mark Dunning, of Essex-based construction company, Grassform, ensures that his company’s approach to golf course construction is the same as their approach to any project.

“We will always consider the environmental impact and work with the architect and/or engineers to provide solutions to this effect. Making use of natural landscapes is one way to reduce the need to unnecessarily move soil around in developing course shape and terrain,” said Mark.

“By carefully grading soils and using them for a variety of areas, a minimal amount of extra material is needed and as it’s on site, why not use it?” he added.

Trees also provide a convenient aspect with which to challenge a player, so removal should only be carried out unless ultimately necessary. The approach should be to use any natural resource to make the golf course aesthetically pleasing to the eye but also provide a stiff test of skill and power for a wide range of players.

A flat and lifeless course would be very boring to play on after all, and would generate little challenge for higher-level golfers.

The aim is always to leave a golf club with a course that is as interesting as possible, both in terms of its visual aspect and so too its playability. A prime example of their work can be seen at Luton Hoo’s recently opened 18 hole course where the company were contracted with construction within a Capability Brown-listed landscape.

Working for main contractor Cardy Construction, Grassform’s team were faced with building across a varied terrain, using their skills in landscaping to make use of natural materials and topography. The fact that within the Capability Brown areas minimal excavations and drainage were allowed (due to its historical significance) meant for some interesting shaping of banks and levels to increase the visual aspect while still providing suitable falls for water flow. The addition of wild flowering mixes around parts of the course gave a natural landscape feel to areas of the site that were previously barren land.

Identifying the needs of a course will ultimately depend on its location and type. A parkland course will benefit from multiple tree and shrub varieties to offer colour differences throughout the year, whereas a links course may utilise resources such as rocks or sand dunes to provide a more interesting aspect. The same can be said of heathland courses, where gorse can be used not only as the division between each hole, but



also as a nasty trap for the wayward ball, often providing interesting extraction techniques from frustrated golfers.

Although not always in the remit of the landscape contractor, exciting use of groundcover plants and shrubs can provide testing lies and angles of approach. If these resources are already in place, then a reduced environmental cost of introducing these can be achieved. Of course, design of a course should usually include this diversity where possible as it aids in the feeling that the golf course has always been there and is part of a natural landscape, when of course it is not and is there as a leisure facility.

The term landscaping does not just relate to “soft” aspects such as plants and soil. Hard landscaping is also a key ingredient to the feel of a course, and this can include areas such as tarmac, buildings or wooden structures such as steps or retaining walls. Building such hard landscape structures not only adds to the feel but also provides shelter and access near greens, fairways and paths.

The use of buggies can be a major concern for many courses come the winter months, when the condition of the ground often deteriorates to such an extent that these along with powered or even conventional trolley use is banned. Not only does this limit the potential use of the course for those who cannot haul a bag or trolley around,

but it is also irksome for members who often pay high membership fees for their golf.

Coombe Hill Golf Club experienced this problem. The undulating course had an existing soil base buggy path system but heavy rain had caused many parts to be washed away, resulting in a ban on buggy use. The club turned to Grassform to completely renew their path system by installing



a tarmac layout with a small stone top to ensure all round usage would be possible. The end result weaves between trees and follows the fairways as much as possible, allowing golfers as close to their shot but still providing a pleasing drive around the course between each stroke.

Lakes and ponds are other interesting aspects of any golf course. Courses featuring water are not only more risky to play given the penalty stroke that they attract, but they add to the natural

aspect of any course and offer potential for water storage and harvesting.

Indeed, the subject of water harvesting in golf courses is one that is sure to rear its head more with future designs given increasing water costs and the fear of global warming. It makes sense to fashion lakes and ponds that can store water for irrigation rather than pay for mains or the

building of a massive out of sight storage reservoir. Utilising natural shapes in the course is the ideal way to create these storage areas, and when combined with drainage outfalls then this can lead to a good source of usable water. Being sustainable, this system will reduce costs and is something that Mark is keen to promote.

“Being green conscious is something that we are enthusiastic about and by implementing schemes such as water harvesting this will allow golf courses to be more self sufficient and sustainable.

We also tend to try and use materials from a renewable source where possible, reducing our impact within the construction phase of the build,” explained Mark.

**Grassform Ltd specialise in the creation of golf courses, sportsfields and landscapes.**

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