



DIARY OF A GOLF COURSE

By Peter Jones

Last month Peter Jones looked at the development of a new golf course, currently under construction near Guildford, and the decisions involved in getting a new golf course established. This month we hear about some of the seed mixtures chosen, and the design principles employed to ensure the course will be relatively easy to build and maintain, while making it appeal to its target group of golfers.

Finding a suitable site close to the centre of Guildford for the new Clandon Park Golf Club was no mean feat, and although some may have questioned the feasibility of a new club being adjacent to an established course, and less than two miles from another relatively new course, it is fair to say that the Clandon Park site lends itself wonderfully to being a golf course, benefiting from a gently rolling topography.

A business decision was made by the owners/operators to create a good quality course for the Pay & Play market, and therefore the course would have to appeal to a range of golfers, and provide a sufficient challenge and an incentive for them to want to play it again and again. The challenge set to the design and construction team was to build a course that would provide such appeal, yet also be relatively inexpensive to build and maintain.

A budget of approximately £1.5m was proposed for the construction of the course, including the irrigation system, which by today's standards is less than half of what some courses cost to build.

Key design principles used to help control construction and/or costs included:

- Generous green sizes to spread the wear, averaging 520m² (566yds²).
- Greens constructed well away from existing trees
- Two or three good sized teeing areas on each hole, with tee area averaging 500m² per hole.
- Use of On-site soil as main component for tee construction

- Single side-to-side French drain across each tee
- A maximum of 40 greenside bunkers
- A maximum of 20 fairway bunkers
- The use of mowable grass hollows as low maintenance features
- All banks mowable with ride-on mowers
- Irrigation to Greens, Tees and Approaches only. (Not fairways)
- Designated 'Conservation Areas' which will receive little significant maintenance
- Limited numbers of proposed new trees, to be planted well away from tees and greens to avoid long term future problems
- Use of drainage soak-aways into the chalk as preferred choice of drainage system

Fairway Areas

Typically the biggest areas, fine turf areas to be prepared on a course are the fairways, and a significant saving was achieved by deciding to retain the existing contours on the majority of the fairway areas, and not to strip the topsoil off and re-shape these areas.

Fairway seed mixture

A choice of seed mixture for the fairways was decided on with the short term objective of maximising the chances of late spring/early summer establishment of sward on non irrigated areas, and the longer term objective of providing good wear tolerance, good summer and winter colour, and excellent drought tolerance. The mixture was based on the following proportions of Perennial ryegrass and a mixture of Fescues, and assumed that the variance in topography across the site would typically favour the ryegrass in the more moist areas, and the fescues in the drier areas:

20% Perennial ryegrass, 30% Slender creeping red fescue; 30% Strong creeping red fescue, 20% Hard fescue.

Perennial ryegrass was included to offer rapid establishment, good wear tolerance and excellent drought tolerance for the species. Hard fescue for superior drought tolerance for non-irrigated fairways and good winter colour. With a high percentage of creeping red fescues to offer excellent recovery capability and drought tolerance.

Deep Rough seed mixture

In order to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the course in the summer, and also reduce the area of rough to be mown, a seed mixture was chosen for designated deep rough areas with the intention of letting the grasses go to seed each year. This mixture consisted of Slender CRF, Strong CRF, Chewings fescue, and Hard fescue. A proportion of topsoil was removed from these areas to help reduce the rate of growth.

Conservation Areas

Areas identified for Conservation and Wildflower mixtures were completely stripped of topsoil to provide as little soil as practical to sow into, and the salvaged topsoil was transported across the site for future use on the fairways that would be constructed in the Wildflower areas can be notoriously difficult to maintain to their full potential over the long term, and therefore all attempts were made to maximise the chances of success from the offset in order to reduce maintenance costs. If successful, the long seeding grasses and predominant wildflower colours of yellow, white and purple should help to provide a magnificent appearance to the course, and bring rich benefits to the environment for wildlife.

Next month - construction techniques used to deal with extensive flint stone problems