



# IT CAN BE DONE!

*In a series of articles following the development of a new golf course, currently under construction in the South East of England, Peter Jones looks at the decision making processes involved in getting a new golf course established, so that it has every possible chance of being a financial success.*

**When the R&A produced its “Demand for Golf” document in the mid ‘80s and suggested that hundreds of new golf courses were needed in the UK to satisfy demand, the floodgates opened and dozens of new golf courses sprung up all around the country. It was a boom time for new jobs in Greenkeeping, and also for sales companies, but many of the hopeful entrepreneurs that had taken the plunge to move into the golf business, had to sit back and face the grim realisation that the initial targets had been and overly optimistic and too generalised, and there simply weren’t enough golfers to go round.**

Many of the new golf clubs went on the market and some were bought and sold once, twice and even three times before owners could turn the business into a going concern. The impact on many of the greenkeepers employed on these courses was often a tightening of the purse strings, as prudent owners attempted to make the clubs viable.

So who in their right mind would consider developing a new golf course today, especially around the M25 corridor, where golf courses are already in abundance?

And if there were such people, what sort of golf course would they choose to build? A Pay & Play? A Private members course? A 6-hole, a 9-hole, or an 18 hole course?

A long course? A short course? A simple course with plain, natural features, or a dramatic course with man-made lakes, eye-catching mounds and bunkers?

If you, (the Greenkeeper) were a stakeholder of the business, and involved in the decision making process, what decisions would you try to influence to make the course a success in financial terms?

Would you want a lot of staff and very high standards of presentation? Or would you choose fewer staff, safe in the knowledge that their jobs would be “safe”?

How about your choice of grasses on the greens, tees, fairways, and roughs? Would you choose Bentgrass on the greens? If so, would it be Creeping Bent? Colonial Bent? Velvet Bent? Some may even consider dwarf Ryegrass; – would you?

If fairway irrigation was not a financial option, would you choose ryegrass on the fairways to help cope with wear?

Or would you be determined to choose a seed mixture that suited the natural environment and natural soil in textbook fashion, irrespective of what its performance characteristics?

And when came to working out your maintenance regime, what would be your recommendation be to streamline your costs for the future success of the business? Long rough, or no rough between fairways? Semi-rough or not? Fast greens (8’6” for regular play) or Medium pace greens? (6’6” for regular play). One hole cup on the green, moved three times a week? Or two hole cups on the green, moved twice a week?

All these factors and many, many more are open for discussion when embarking on a new golf course project, and the decisions that are made could make all the difference in the world to the cost of maintaining the course, and whether the golfer enjoys their game of golf.

Over the next few months, a series of articles will follow the development of Clandon Park Golf Club, a new Pay & Play course under construction near Guildford, and sandwiched in between two other existing 18 hole courses, one of which is just the other side of the fence.





The site of the 1st green, which was arable farmland.

It is of course possible that this may be one of the last ever new courses to be built in the South East, (with the exception of those linked to new housing developments) and it will therefore be interesting to see how it fairs commercially, and what it will have to offer golfers in terms of fun on the golf course, and value for money.

Planning permission for the course was approved several years ago, but it is only last year that the planning conditions were signed off and the project was given the go-ahead.

A total ban on the felling of trees on part of the site which was originally earmarked for the course meant that another piece of adjoining land had to be utilised instead. An old flint & chalk quarry was therefore taken into the curtilage of the site to provide sufficient acreage for the course, and with it came a string of environmental issues and what seemed like a mountain of paperwork was required by the Local Borough Council that must have taken the felling of a small rainforest to provide the paper they needed.



Quarry floor – Protected area. Home of the Cudweed – Globally endangered plant





Tree protection fences and Ivy covering trees

### The Quarry

The inclusion of the Quarry area into the golf course allowed two holes to be designed providing interesting and unique views of the flint seams in the Quarry face and the chalk floor, plus the opportunity to have a tee shot which plays over a nine metre high sheer face to an elevated fairway landing area in the middle of the quarry. The majority of the quarry, including the sheer faces, was found to be colonised by butterfly bushes (*Buddleia* spp.) providing cover for resident rabbits and deer, and an embankment on the south facing edge of the quarry was found to be the home to Badgers with a fairly extensive sett with five entrance holes. No work would be permitted near here either.

The floor of the Quarry was also found to be the home to the Broad-leaved cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*) a globally threatened/declining plant categorised as 'Endangered'. Large areas of the quarry floor were deemed as Protected Areas, and no work would be permitted near here.

The local 'Bat man' was deployed to visit the site and carry out a bat survey on the trees before work could start. No bats were detected, but an instruction was given that work must stop if a bat was found to be roosting behind the ivy on the trees earmarked for felling.

Protection of existing trees during the construction phase was a prerequisite which involved several kilometres of protective fencing to be erected before a start could be made on site.

Closer inspection of the trees found that some had decayed inside, and these were felled. A question as to whether the Ivy was to blame for the condition of the trees was asked, and remains open for debate.

Last but not least, the local archaeology 'Time-team' were deployed to check the site for traces of ancient activity and valuable artifacts. It was determined by another local authority department that topsoil would be removed from test strips amounting to no more than 4% of the site, and an estimate of some £7,500 was budgeted for to carry out the work. The final bill exceeded £50k, which is possibly another reason why there may not be any new golf courses built around the Guildford area in the future.

In the next issue, the article will look at the decisions made in relation to the design, agronomy, and future maintenance objectives for the course to help ensure the financial success of the project.

These will include: The construction budget, maintenance budget, choice of grasses, ease and speed of play, ease of maintenance, the Quarry, landscape design, soil type, flora & fauna, & conservation requirements



Archaeology investigations