

# DRAINAGE PROBLEM? WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU CALL IN THE CONTRACTORS...

When it comes to sportsturf drainage, there can't be many companies in the UK more experienced than Wiltshire based MJ Abbott. From humble beginnings more than 40 years ago, they've established themselves as one of the industry's leading contractors. From challenging ground conditions to challenging weather, it's fair to say the company has learnt a thing or two along the way about the things that allow the smooth progression of a major drainage installation.

Contracts Director Nigel Wyatt shares his thoughts on the subject

## Consultant v-Contractor

If you're planning a major drainage project, you may wish to seek the advice of a consultant. This has several benefits. Consultants are independent so you get sound, unbiased advice. They'll be able to discuss their past projects with you and will make recommendations which suit your site and budget. Alternatively, you may want to oversee the project yourself and appoint a contractor. Here's how both processes work:

## Contractor

Choose a reputable contractor, preferably one which is a member of the Land Drainage Contractors Association. The LDCA ([www.ldca.org](http://www.ldca.org)) publishes guidelines which set out the standard of workmanship and materials for sportsturf drainage. These guidelines are recognised by sporting bodies such as the standard to which sportsturf drainage should be installed.

Seek recommendation from your peers. Ask them about their relationship with the contractor. Were they happy with the workmanship? Did the installation go smoothly and, importantly, would they use them again?

When drawing up a shortlist, select up to three to choose one from. Ensure parity of specifications as tenders may differ significantly.

## Consultant

A consultant will begin by undertaking a site investigation. From there he or she will produce a design, prepare a bill of quantities and a full specification.

They will assist you in the selection of a contractor and will issue tender documents. They will then evaluate the tenders and after the appointment of a contractor, they'll oversee the work.



Nigel Wyatt on site  
Picture courtesy of Mike Beardall

## What's next?

When the contractors' tenders have been received, remember to compare specifications as well as quotes. The cheapest quote may not necessarily be the best value for money. If any part of the tender is unclear, ask for further information.

## Awarding the contract

When you've made your selection, agree timings and payment terms with the contractor. This may include retentions and the provision of aftercare once the job's complete.

## Health & Safety

Be aware of your obligations relating to Health & Safety. If the project is expected to take longer than 30 working days (or 500 man days), then the golf club is legally obliged to appoint a qualified CDM (Construction Design and Management) Coordinator who will notify the Health and Safety Executive about the project as part of CDM (2007) regulations using a form F10.

The CDM Coordinator is responsible for appointing a competent contractor, ensuring that the relevant health and safety procedures are in place and that they're adhered to. Regardless of the need for notification, the contractor will produce their own health and safety construction plans which will include risk assessments, traffic management and method statements for the work being undertaken.

Carry out all necessary service searches for existing services such as gas, water and electricity. Make plans showing old and existing drainage, such as clay drains, available to the contractor.

## Progress & Supervision

It goes without saying that you'll want the very best for your golf course. Carry out your own quality control checks by:

- Confirming that the on-site team are qualified and experienced
- Ensuring that suitable, well-maintained machinery is used
- Checking the specifications and quality of backfill materials (ie gravel and sand) when delivered



Drainage lines at Fairmont St Andrews - Copyright MJ Abbott Limited

- Inspecting both the trenches and junctions before they're backfilled
- Expecting a clean and tidy site  
Obtain a plan from the contractor showing the 'as constructed' layout.

### How much will it cost?

Costs are determined by design and the design is determined by use, the present conditions and the resources available. This will take into account the Club's expectations, the quality of the facility and the standard of aftercare required.

### Settlement

Settlement can occur in areas with high clay content in the subsoil. During times of drought, shrinkage of the soil particles causes the settlement of drainage trench lines and remedial work needs to be carried out to avoid depressions in the surface. You should make sure that remedial measures to cater for trench settlement are agreed in advance with your contractor. You should also discuss disturbance, reinstatement and aftercare. The construction phase will create disturbance and the timing of the project will affect it.

### Aftercare

Most contractors will provide an aftercare service which may include watering, overseeding and fertiliser applications. It is generally accepted that the contractor should return the site to the state it was in prior to work commencing.

### Summary

So, to get the installation that's right for you:

- Get good advice
- Talk to others who have had work done
- Employ a reputable contractor
- Don't necessarily go for the cheapest
- Get 'as built' drawings
- Be aware of the effects of the drainage installation on the playing surface

### The Course Manager

Finally, a word about the Course Manager. Their role in any major project and their working relationship with the contractor is critical to its progression and successful completion.

Over the 30 years I've been involved with drainage projects across the UK, I've identified ten things that Course Managers can do to help their installation run smoothly. They are:

1. Forward the details of existing drainage and services, outfalls etc. to the contractor before the project commences
2. Be aware of relevant Health & Safety issues and regulations
3. When planning the process, consider the time of year. To minimise disruption to the course, installation should take place during spring, summer or autumn.
4. Tendering – Ensure there's an adequate turn around time during the tender process to allow the contractor to deliver the tender back – 10 days isn't sufficient!
5. Draw up a plan of working practices with your contractor so you are both aware of each



Trenching at Northop GC - Copyright MJ Abbott Ltd

other's expectations and limitations

6. Maintain open channels of communication – keep involved and up to date with progress

7. Approve all materials before use - Check the quality.

8. Be realistic – Have clear expectations and be prepared for a small amount of disruption to your course

9. Keep your Greens Committee informed on progress with regular updates so they can keep their golfers informed

10. Keep in contact with your contractor - Good client/contractor relationships are built over time as contractors become accustomed to the site and staff. When the project is completed, maintain contact with your contractor and keep them informed of progress. They are there to support you moving forwards.

Phil Chiverton has worked with MJ Abbott since beginning work at The Grove in February 2001. He believes that there are many advantages in maintaining an ongoing relationship with a contractor.

"Drainage is something we're constantly looking to improve. Working with Abbotts, we continually assess the situation to identify improvements we can make, whether that's sand or gravel banding or pipe drainage. Because they carried out the initial drainage works at the Club, they have our drainage network installed on their GPS, enabling us to map

out the areas which require attention."

"It's important to implement good working practices when contractors are on site. Before work commences, I sit down with them and put together a scope of works which includes method statements and risk assessments. I make arrangements for the contractor's on-site team to have access to showers and hot food and we talk about how we can complete the work with minimal disruption and damage to the course."



Trench at Northop GC - Copyright MJ Abbott Ltd