



A wide-angle photograph of a lush green golf course. In the background, a white goalpost stands on the left side. The field is filled with vibrant green grass, and a dense line of trees forms the horizon under a clear sky. The overall scene is bright and open.

# The recession can throw up opportunities

**Doom and gloom seems to be widespread in the golf sector at present. Reasons are not hard to find, says David Shelton**



**In the clubs significantly more members have not renewed their membership in comparison with earlier years.**

Relatively few clubs now charge an entrance fee so golfers dissatisfied with the condition of their home course tend to move to a better maintained course in the vicinity. Waiting lists for club membership have virtually disappeared.

The EGU estimates there are two million golfers not members of a club. They propose communicating with this important market firstly to win visitors and society business, but also to promote the benefits of golf club membership.

After months of above average rainfall many golf courses on the heavier soils face a dilemma. They have had to resort to the use of temporary greens for long periods. Additionally they have had to close part or all of some fairways. Many of their members have either left already or plan to do so if matters are not speedily rectified.

But it all boils down to finance. Membership income is down, bar takings are down and the pro-shop income has fallen steeply. So where is the money coming from for capital expenditure? It is a vicious circle - without expenditure things will only get worse.

For heavier land courses top of the list for capital expenditure MUST be to improve the drainage of tees, greens and fairways. You can't afford it? Well read on, because the recession can throw-up opportunities.

Much new machinery is available at discount prices. Used and rebuilt machinery seems plentiful. Lower oil prices have led to keen prices for land drainage pipes, and aggregate suppliers have little demand from the building sector so demand a discount from them, also.

The Government's policy of freeing-up the money supply for smaller businesses seems to be feeding through to the sharp end. Attractive rates of interest should enable those clubs with a well thought out drainage scheme and business plan to get funding.

**What do I mean by a well thought out drainage scheme?**

***It is essential to accurately identify the drainage problem.***

Analyse when it occurs; can satellite imaging help? Refer to old maps; and undertake an on-site survey.



**Consider all the options and cost them**

Can expenditure on new or refurbished equipment be justified? Could specialist equipment be hired? Perhaps hiring with a skilled operator would be a better option? What would be the cost of engaging a specialist sportsturf drainage contractor? Is partnership working possible if we supply some of the labour, tractors and trailers? What rates of interest can be negotiated and over how many years? Are there any grants available?

**The layout of the drains.**

Would the herringbone or flag layout be preferable? Drain spacing - what can we afford at this juncture? Can we make provision for additional drainage at a later date? Is it necessary to have a secondary system superimposed over the primary system? Could we do this ourselves? Pipe sizes - why is bigger not necessarily better? And, at what depth

should they be installed on the heavy clay soil? Back-filling aggregates are relatively expensive - how can money be saved here? *Disruption costs can be significant; they need to be carefully costed.* What damage to the playing area can we expect? What will be the cost, in labour and materials, of this re-instatement. How long will the facility be out of play? Is it really possible to 'drain today and play tomorrow'? (the answer is yes!)

**Established golf greens.**

Remaking established golf greens to USGA standards may not be the best way forward in the light of ever-higher irrigation costs and restrictions on fertiliser usage. There are three techniques of drainage available - would they suit our circumstances? Shelton claims their Lightening-drain system rivals USGA specification when it comes to speed of drainage!

**The golden rules**

Do you know what they are?

If an expenditure of this amount is to be made what is going to be our marketing plan? How many lost members can be persuaded to return? How many new members can be wooed from neighbouring clubs? Can we significantly increase income from green fees and visiting societies?

There have been massive strides in the development of land drainage machinery and techniques in recent years. The Shelton company has the biggest research and development programme into sportsturf drainage of any business or organisation anywhere. This research and development expenditure aims to make these benefits affordable to the majority; why not be one of them?

The recession has created many problems in the world of golf. But look upon the problems as a challenge. In the words of Napoleon Hill, "when the going gets tough watch how the tough get going".

**ABOVE:** Shelton Lightening-drain™ installed on a golf green. It is the world's fastest land drainage system.

**LEFT ABOVE:** Special grassland tyres on this 4-wheels in line trailer spread the load on fine turf and virtually eliminate the need for re-instatement works.

**LEFT BELOW:** The latest specialist equipment minimises damage to fine turf; note the pipes fit snugly in the trench.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** A secondary system superimposed over the primary piped layout may be the most cost-effective, and most efficient drainage plan.

**about the author**

David Shelton heads Shelton Sportsturf Drainage Solutions LLP. See their website: [www.sheltonsdrainage.com](http://www.sheltonsdrainage.com) for further information or telephone 01507 578288 to talk with David Shelton or the technical staff about equipment sales, hire or contracting. Shelton Sportsturf Drainage Solutions LLP has a powerpoint presentation of approximately 45-50 minutes duration on this topic. A technical member of their staff is available to talk to BIGGA Section meetings or similar groups of a minimum of 20 persons.