No club can afford to rest on its laurels, but investing in a major course upgrade calls for money, brave decisions and a long-term approach. Rob Smith takes a look at what happens when the custodians of Tandridge, an established Harry Colt course in Surrey, decided that it was time for a change...
Harry Colt is considered by many as one of – if not the – greatest golf course architect of all time. He has a larger presence in our Top 100 UK & Ireland corporate business. The confidence to continue to attract society and order to give a competitive edge both architect should be considered, in existence. This echoed thoughts by deliberated why the course was a gem the club’s marketing committee, who in-depth upgrade. Tandridge’s has recently benefitted from a lengthy course is Tandridge in Surrey, which and in-depth upgrade. Tandridge’s has recently benefitted from a lengthy

Tandridge Timeline

- APRIL 2011
  - First issue of bonds – £300,000
- AUG-SEPT 2011
  - Phase 2 – work on remainder of front 3
- JAN-FEB 2012
  - Phase 3 – work on holes 13-15
- OCTOBER 2012
  - Phase 4 – work on holes 16 & 18 & 19
- APRIL 2013
  - Second issue of bonds – £260,000
- AUGUST 2013
  - Phase 5 – work on holes 14, 15 & 17

According to Iain Dye, who took over as course manager towards the end of the works having been involved all the way through, the new tee was the greatest construction challenge: “This area underwent huge transformation, with thousands of tonnes of soil moved to create a new pathway and the new back tee.” The short hole that follows this now has a far more challenging back tee that adds 40 yards, and the tee on the final hole have been repositioned so they are now at the top of the hill, creating an attractive and dramatic tee shot with the clubhouse in view. To ease costs, the club split the work between one major contractor and its own greenkeeping staff. Whilst the former worked on landscaping, tee building and the shaping and drainage of the bunkers, the Tandridge team did much of the finishing work, such as the sodding and the sanding.

Battling on... This remarkable British weather was perhaps the biggest physical challenge. In August 2012, strong thunderstorms resulted in more than an inch of rain in a day. Some of the bunkers suffered damaging wash-outs resulting in an insurance claim. The contractor returned to rebuild several, installing storm-proofing to channel rainwater around their perimeters. It was also found that the angles of some of the faces were too step. Happily, you will never avoid the impact of severe rainfall, slight adjustments to the gradients and a change in the type of sand has minimised the problem. A second difficulty with the new bunkers was identified as stones emerged that had risen up through the sand. This led to a new approach of lining the bases with upturned turf to act as a barrier to stones whilst allowing drainage. The work was completed in August 2013, with minor tweaks and bedding-in activity continuing.Being a left-handed player... Above – the 13th at Tandridge, Top, the green as played in the 1950s. Middle, the view from the tee prior to the recent upgrade. Bottom, renovation work adds much to this character-filled new-shooter

Opposite – The signature 14th now back to old style, built and bunkers now frame the green

Trees had been allowed to grow in from the left so that the green was unseen from the tee. The original Colt style rough-edged sand-face bunkers were all restored, and the view of the green re-instated by pruning and the re-siting of some small trees. After a few months, feedback was invited from the membership. This gave the committee the confidence and remit to go ahead with the full project, with the major work being conducted off-season over a number of phases. As work continued, the editor of Golf Course Architect, Adam Lawrence, described the project as “Perhaps the most dramatic restoration of a Golden Age golf course yet.” Some of the holes required little change, whilst others received substantial makeovers. One of the most dramatic changes is the new back tee on the club’s signature hole, the 14th. Repositioning of the other trees means they are no longer in view whilst playing the previous hole, and the green is now framed by bunkers, some of which had been removed.

“Ringing the Changes

The following five are just a handful of the clubs all over the UK & Ireland who are also investing in change...

Beawood Lakes

Even the new courses are not immune from change. This Martin Hawtree design has undergone remodelling by Guy Hockley on the back nine, including new bunkers and tees. The greatest change is the augmentation of the lake between holes 8 and 9 which has made the latter a tough par 5 across water.

Broadstone

The expertise of Frank Pont is in demand, and this classic Colt design from 1914 is about to be benefiting from his assistance, particularly the bunker shaping, tee complexes and some of the green sizes.

Delamere Forest

In 2012, the club decided to strengthen the course and reinstates its original heathland character. Mackenzie and Ebert have returned every bunker to the original Herbert Fowler design, and all of the greens have been remodelled. The club also provides additional pin placement options and run-off areas.

Prince’s

Overseen by Gary Johnson from Colt Associates, Prince’s has been upgraded at a cost of £250,000. More than 90 bunkers were renovated and rewritten to encourage the ball to run towards them, and there are two new fairways, the 4th on the Dunes and 6th on the Himalayas.

Moorpark

This former Ryder Cup venue has been the subject of a 10-year upgrade by Creative Golf Design. The most recent work has seen the removal of some non-deciduous trees and minor bunker adjustments, and there is some heather rejuvenation ongoing.
A strange law of construction economics is that no matter how high you estimate, it will always cost more. Tandridge paid for the work with the support of its membership through two issues of interest-free bonds. The first raised £300,000, and the second a further £126,000. The reason for the second tranche was that there had been some under-estimation of costs compounded by the storm damage that necessitated a revised approach. By getting the club’s own greenkeeping staff involved, these two sums paid for the external work, and with visitor income up 10% in the year since completion in what is generally a declining market, the club is already beginning to pay these back.

Frank Pont...
The man with the plan

Any restoration project has two key components: analysis and process. At Tandridge, the analysis was easy because we had an old aerial picture of the course when it had just opened, plus on-the-ground historical pictures showing the bunkers’ original size and style. We were lucky that many bunkers in the past had been grassed over (the equivalent of mothballing) so it was easy to bring them back. Tandridge is unique for a Colt course in that it originally had close to 250 bunkers, more than any other Colt course I have ever seen. Even Muirfield has about 100 fewer. Not only that, but many of the bunkers were absolutely huge. The greatest challenge was to get the committee and membership to realise what a very special asset they were custodians of, and to convince them that for the real character of their Colt course to re-emerge it was crucial to bring back both a large number of bunkers, but also to restore them back to their original style and sizes.