

NATURAL BEDFELLOWS

CLOSING THOUGHTS

By Adam Lawrence

Adam Lawrence is editor of *By Design* and *Golf Course Architecture*. He is also a leading commentator on the global golf development business.

Adam Lawrence says golf architects, masterplanners and developers can find better ways of integrating golf and real estate.

Attending the recent ASGCA Annual Meeting in Georgia and hearing a leading US golf developer assert that golf and real estate still belong together was a lightbulb moment for me.

Ever since housing markets in the US, Europe and many other countries came under pressure in 2008, leading to a virtual halt in the development of golf and real estate projects, it has been fashionable to assert that the business model that sees housing intermingled with golf holes is broken, and that we won't see many projects of this kind in the foreseeable future.

I take a different view. To me, golf and housing are natural bedfellows.

Since developer Walter Tarrant and architect Harry Colt built the St George's Hill estate south of London in 1912, we have over 100 years of evidence that golf adds value to homes, and vice-versa. The model, in my eyes, is not broken. It might be slightly battered, and it might be in need of improvements, but essentially it still works.

Some of the changes that must happen are at the level of masterplanning. Pretty much everyone in golf now understands that hole after hole lined on both sides with housing may be a short term win for developers, creating a vast number of golf-frontage lots, but longer term, it results in a golf course that is doomed to mediocrity. Rather, put the houses in clumps, which will help create a community feel, as well as making the development more pedestrian friendly and, by the by, making the golf course feel more integrated. Keeping the footprint of the golf course compact is good for sustainability; it also encourages people to walk the course, rather

than riding a cart, with obvious benefits for health. It is good to hear from architect Brian Curley, ASGCA, that almost all his firm's projects in China are now focused on core golf.

But there need to be changes to the type of golf design that is deployed on real estate developments too.

Many developers believe homebuyers like to see acre after acre of finely maintained turf, but in a world where water is precious and maintenance budgets under pressure, reducing the area of turfgrass that is mowed, irrigated and fertilized is absolutely essential. Moreover, much of the push for longer courses—even on developments that have no intention of ever trying to host a professional or leading amateur event—comes, again, from the desire to maximise golf frontage.

This is wholly understandable, but the best advert for a development is a golf course that is popular and economically thriving. Advocates of longer courses say that, as long as there are

sufficient forward tees, they are playable by all, but this misses the key point. Length is essentially directly opposed to sustainability; longer courses cost more to maintain, take more time to play (even from shorter tees, never mind the inevitable tendency of golfers to play further back than they really should) and demand more land. What the Tee it Forward campaign and the work of activists like Arthur Little is revealing is that 6,500 yards, planned intelligently, is plenty of golf for the vast majority of players.

Across the world, there are huge opportunities for golf to support the development of much-needed housing, and for that housing to support the growth of golf. In countries such as India, Nigeria and Brazil, where a huge emerging middle class is looking for better, more secure homes, golf estates will boom.

The game will boom with them, if developers, masterplanners and golf architects learn to work together more intelligently and produce projects that hit the spot for golf and housing alike.

(http://asgca.org/images/stories/by-design/2014/By_Design_-_Issue_15__Summer_2013.pdf)