

Taking a wider approach to construction

Despite news of the resurgence in the construction sector, there are few new hotels and leisure centres — and virtually no commercial property — being built. Many construction companies are focusing on refurbishments and remodelling and, if they're smart, improving their customer service.

Beard is one that takes a novel approach and invests considerable time and effort to meet its customers' wider business needs.

That may mean minimising closure and disruption which could directly affect the bottom line; or completing a project within a specific time frame, such as fitting out a new clubhouse before the rugby season starts. Before going onsite sub contractors and key members of the customer team discuss the main priorities, the customer's intentions for the new space, how it will be used and the phasing of works — enabling contracting staff to buy into the detailed draft programme of works, incorporate issues for comment and agree to try and exceed expectations.

Today it's also usual to discuss the sustainability of materials, building and waste disposal processes, the choices of energy saving lighting, heat and power control, accessibility for maintenance, future proofing, durability and possibilities for recycling materials, so customers can make the right choices and any last minute changes required.

For conservation projects the question of sourcing original materials to replace existing items, or manufacturing replacements and locating environmentally friendly sustainable

materials to match the originals, always needs to be clarified.

These tactics seem to work, since Beard has won several awards, including the Oxford Preservation Trust and Chartered Institute of Building Project Manager of the Year.

THE ASHMOLEAN

The recent refurbishment of the western art galleries in the Museum's original Cockerell building involved the Oxford University Estates Directorate's surveyors, the heads of department at the museum and the facilities manager, as well as the construction team.

At the initial meeting Beard identified that the Ashmolean's objectives were to keep the museum open as much as possible to avoid a reduction in footfall and subsequent income from shops, cafes and donations; to keep access routes around the closed galleries as clear and accessible to the public as possible; to minimise disruption, dust and noise; to maximise safety and security, not only of the general public, but also the precious artefacts on display.

So, plenty of challenges!

The Beard team for the Ashmolean Museum, led by property services manager Nick

Bradley, acted as the focal point to ensure the customer's priorities were observed. As well as visiting the site and calling the customer regularly, Nick scheduled weekly meetings, had a full time site presence and ensured the team always knew what was happening.

The net result — little disruption to visitors to other galleries, revenue continued despite the works and noise and dust was kept to a minimum. In January 2009, the Museum closed fully for the final building works and the new and refurbished Ashmolean reopened in November.

Christopher Brown, Director of the Ashmolean Museum commented: "From the outset, our ambition has been to create not just an improved and expanded version of Britain's oldest public museum, but something significantly different in kind: a new way of showcasing the Ashmolean's remarkable collections, for the benefit of the widest possible audience."

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